

T H E B O X

BY

RICHARD KELLY

BASED ON THE SHORT STORY

"BUTTON, BUTTON"

BY

RICHARD MATHESON

DARKO ENTERTAINMENT

SEPTEMBER 30, 2006

OVER A BLACK SCREEN:

Crickets chirp in the night.

A DOORBELL rings.

Sheets rustle...

A BEDSIDE LAMP is turned on.

INT. LEWIS HOUSE -- MASTER BEDROOM -- NIGHT

NORMA LEWIS (31) sits up in bed. The soft glow of the lamp casts her in silhouette. Her husband, ARTHUR LEWIS (30), lies next to her.

NORMA
Did you hear something?

ARTHUR
The doorbell.

NORMA
Are you sure that was the doorbell?
From down below... the DOORBELL rings again.

ARTHUR
Yep.

Norma retrieves her WATCH from the bedside table.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
What time is it?

NORMA
Quarter 'til five.

Norma gets out of bed and throws on her bathrobe.

Arthur sits up, hair sticking up in every direction. He has sideburns that run down the side of his face like daggers.

INT. LEWIS HOUSE -- FOYER -- NEXT

Norma comes down the stairs and approaches the front door. She looks through the PEEPHOLE.

Through the PEEPHOLE... she glimpses a BLACK SEDAN idling in the street. It quickly drives off.

Norma unlatches the DEAD BOLT and opens the door. She notices something at her feet.

Someone has left a CARDBOARD BOX on the front step. It's dimensions are 1' x 1' x 1'.

She leans down and picks up the box, noticing that it has been meticulously sealed with clear tape. There are no markings on it whatsoever.

Norma looks down the quiet, empty street. She quickly closes the door and turns inside and away from the cold air.

Arthur arrives at the bottom of the stairs.

ARTHUR

What is it?

NORMA

Someone left a box.

ARTHUR

Who?

NORMA

I don't know. There was a car waiting... but they drove off.

Norma hands the box to Arthur. He examines it.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

Is that one of my Christmas presents?

Their young son, WALTER LEWIS (9), is standing at the top of the stairs. He is dressed in his pajamas.

His parents just stare back at him in silence.

INT. LEWIS HOUSE -- KITCHEN -- MOMENTS LATER

The Lewis family has now moved into the kitchen. WRAPPING PAPER and CHRISTMAS ORNAMENTS are scattered across the table.

Norma is pouring COFFEE. Arthur is cutting through the tape that seals the box with a knife while Walter looks on eagerly.

WALTER

Should I close my eyes?

ARTHUR

Maybe... it's up to you.

Arthur opens the lid and sees that there are FOAM PEANUTS inside. He digs down and retrieves a WOODEN BOX. Its dimensions are 8" x 8" x 8".

The box is made of WHITE OAK with a clear varnish. Mounted on top is a CLEAR GLASS DOME attached to a lid with a HINGE MOUNT. Inside of the dome is a CYLINDRICAL METAL BUTTON.

NORMA

Is there a note?

Arthur reaches inside the box and retrieves a small WHITE ENVELOPE. Printed on the envelope in CALLIGRAPHY is the name:

MRS. LEWIS

ARTHUR

It's for you, Norma.

Norma opens the envelope and removes a folded piece of white stationary.

Printed in elegant calligraphy is a single sentence:

MR. STEWARD WILL CALL UPON YOU AT 5:00 PM.

NORMA

Mr. Steward will call upon you at 5 PM.

(to herself)

Do I know a Mr. Steward?

Arthur yawns.

ARTHUR

I dunno. You tell us.

INT. LEWIS HOUSE -- KITCHEN -- LATER THAT MORNING

Arthur is now showered and shaven, dressed for work. He and Walter sit at the kitchen table, waiting for Norma to deliver breakfast.

The box sits on the table between them.

Arthur opens up the newspaper.

INSERT SHOTS:

RICHMOND TIMES-DISPATCH... FRIDAY, DECEMBER 17, 1976.

BANNER HEADLINE:

OPEC SAID TO DECIDE ON SPLIT HIKE

Arthur turns the page.

ARTHUR
What kind of car was it?

NORMA
I couldn't see. It was dark and I
didn't have my contacts in.

WALTER
Why would they just drive off?

NORMA
I don't know. But the bus will be
here if five minutes... so eat.

EXT. LEWIS HOUSE -- FRONT WALK -- MOMENTS LATER

Norma and Walter emerge from the house onto the front porch.
She hands him his LUNCH BOX and a WINTER HAT. SNOW has begun
to fall from the sky.

WALTER
Last day of school and now it
starts to snow?!

NORMA
Put on your hat...

A young girl, DANA (13) is waiting at the end of the
sidewalk. She is wrapped head-to-toe in warm clothes...
EARMUFFS and SCARF around her neck.

DANA
(muffled through scarf)
Hi Mrs. Lewis.

NORMA
Good morning, Dana.
(shivering)
And please call me Norma. You're
making me feel old.

WALTER
You are old!

NORMA
I'm thirty-one!

WALTER
To us that's old! You're a geezer!

NORMA
Well you'll be a geezer one day
too, smarty-pants.

Norma closes her eyes, taking in a breath of cold air.
Snowflakes land in her face and hair.

Walter sighs... looking at his watch.

WALTER
Why does the bus stop have to be at
the end of our driveway?

NORMA
(high-pitched)
So I can watch my little Walter get
on his bus... safe in one piece!

Down the street, A SCHOOL BUS begins to crest the hill...
fast approaching...

WALTER
Please. Go. Inside. You're
embarrassing me.

NORMA
My love *embarrasses* you?

WALTER
Yes. Yes it does.

She begins to walk down the sidewalk... taunting him as the
bus approaches.

NORMA
What if I give little Walter a
little kiss in front of all his
friends on the school bus?

Dana's eyes widen. A MISCHIEVOUS GRIN emerges from behind the
scarf that covers the lower part of her face.

DANA
Do it!

The bus is fast approaching... brakes squealing as it slows
to a stop.

WALTER
Don't come any closer!

Norma gives him a big HUG and a KISS right as the bus doors
open. A bunch of OLDER KIDS stare out the window... scowling
at him.

Walter pushes away from her and stomps up onto the bus...
mortified. Dana follows him.

NORMA
Dana... you're baby-sitting for us
tonight, right?

DANA
Eight o'clock?

NORMA
Eight o'clock.

DANA
Okay.

Dana gets on the bus. BUD WALL (30s), the bus driver, smiles at Norma. *He is an enormous giant of a man with a shaved head.*

NORMA
Bus-Driver Bud! Merry Christmas...

BUD
Our last day!

NORMA
I know!

BUD
It'll all be over soon, Norma.

He stares at her for a moment that is almost too long... then shuts the doors to the bus.

INT. LEWIS HOUSE -- KITCHEN -- MOMENTS LATER

Arthur sits at the table... reading the morning paper.

The CAMERA zooms into the COMICS SECTION... revealing the panels of the comic strip REX MORGAN, MD. Arthur begins reading the voices of REX MORGAN and his girlfriend JUNE.

ARTHUR
(as Rex Morgan)
*Do you realize that this is the
first time in my life that I will
be taking more than a week's
vacation, June?*

Norma arrives in the kitchen. She now has a slight limp.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
(as June, hi-pitched)
*And enjoy it! Don't worry about the
office!*

NORMA
Rex Morgan... I need you back here
no later than seven. Rehearsal
dinner starts at eight.

Arthur grabs his BRIEFCASE and a BASKETBALL.

ARTHUR
The Viking Squad has a game at
four.

NORMA
Don't get stuck in Friday
traffic...

ARTHUR
Okay June.

He starts bouncing the ball on the kitchen floor.

She grabs the ball in mid bounce... annoyed with him.

NORMA
Not in the house!

ARTHUR
How's your foot?

NORMA
It's fine.

She pushes him toward into the FAMILY ROOM... opening the
door that leads out to the garage.

They exit the house and the CAMERA drifts back toward the
kitchen table... *moving in toward the box.*

EXT. LEWIS HOUSE -- DRIVEWAY -- MOMENTS LATER

The GARAGE DOOR opens and both of the LEWIS FAMILY CARS back
out at the same time, almost choreographed in perfect unison.

Arthur drives a SILVER 1975 PONTIAC TRANS-AM. Norma drives a
WHITE 1976 OLDSMOBILE STATION WAGON with WOOD WALLS.

They pull out onto MONUMENT AVENUE, cars pointing in opposite
directions. Arthur rolls down his window.

ARTHUR
It's your Christmas present.

NORMA
From you?

ARTHUR
From your secret lover.
(beat)
Mr. Steward.

She furrows her brow.

NORMA
(sarcastic)
I hate you, Rex Morgan MD.

ARTHUR
(playful)
I hate you, too.

NORMA
Don't be late tonight.

ARTHUR
I've got your present at work. It's
almost finished.

He smiles... then peels off down Monument Ave.

From Norma's REAR VIEW MIRROR... Arthur's car disappears down
the road. She reaches up to re-adjust... *her eyes appear in
the mirror's reflection.*

INSERT: Norma's VIRGINIA license plate.

The Oldsmobile drives down the street in the opposite
direction.

EXT. DOWNTOWN RICHMOND -- MORNING

HELICOPTER SHOT: The CAMERA crests over the barren WINTER
FOREST on the southeast side of the city... tipping up to
reveal DOWNTOWN RICHMOND, VIRGINIA.

RADIO VOICE (V.O.)
*It's twenty-three degrees on this
December morning here in
Richmond...*

The CAMERA moves over the DOWNTOWN EXPRESSWAY... heavy
traffic moves in either direction.

The CAMERA approaches the side of ARTHUR'S TRANS-AM as it
crests around the INTERSTATE EXCHANGE onto ROUTE 64 at the
HISTORICAL CLOCK TOWER of MAIN STREET TRAIN STATION.

RADIO VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
The French government, in what was
seen here as a gesture to President-
elect Jimmy Carter, announced
Thursday a further tightening of
controls over the exportation of
nuclear technology.

The CAMERA swoops down alongside the driver's side of
Arthur's car... moving into the SIDE VIEW MIRROR. His face
reflected in the mirror... listening to the radio as he
begins his southbound commute to work.

EXT. COLLEGIATE SCHOOL -- MORNING

The CAMERA pulls back from a sign at the entrance to
COLLEGIATE... an exclusive PRIVATE SCHOOL. Norma's STATION
WAGON pulls into the school parking lot.

INT. COLLEGIATE SCHOOL -- HALLWAY -- MOMENTS LATER

The CAMERA tracks with Norma as makes her way through the
CROWDED HALLWAY... filled with LOUD TEENAGERS from the age of
9-18. Her limp has gotten worse.

She WINKS at someone... then turns a corner and the CAMERA
whips around to reveal WALTER standing at his locker. He
closes the door, revealing Dana and another friend named
CHARLES (12) standing there.

DANA
Why does your mom limp?

CHARLES
Yeah... is something wrong with her
foot?

WALTER
That's none of your business.

CHARLES
Dana saw her take her shoe off in
the parking lot yesterday.

DANA
There's definitely something wrong
with her foot. It looks mangled.

CHARLES
You didn't say mangled... you said
it looked gross.

Walter lunges at Charles and pushes him up against the
locker... awkwardly trying to fight him.

They continue to wrestle awkwardly for a moment against the lockers and then Walter lets go... backing away.

WALTER
If you ever make fun of my mom
again I'll kill you!

Walter storms off down the hall.

INT. COLLEGIATE SCHOOL -- OFFICE -- MOMENTS LATER

The CAMERA moves through the SCHOOL OFFICE as teachers and RECEPTIONISTS move about in preparation for the last day, approaching a FROSTED GLASS DOOR that reads:

DR. WILLIAM H. POATES

INT. COLLEGIATE SCHOOL -- PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE -- NEXT

Norma sits across from the desk of WILLIAM POATES (45), the principal of the school.

POATES
The uhhh... the board came to a
vote last week, so it's official.
They've officially cancelled the
faculty tuition discount.

NORMA
So what does that mean for me?

POATES
You're going to have to start
paying full tuition for your son.

NORMA
Starting when?

POATES
Next semester.

Norma notices a SMALL DROP of BLOOD forming in his right nostril.

NORMA
Okay.

POATES
I'm real sorry about this, Norma.

NORMA
Yeah, me too. I've got three weeks
to figure out how to tell my son we
can't afford to send him to
Collegiate any more.

The drop of blood has begun to flow down onto his upper lip.

POATES
Like I said, I'm real sorry.

NORMA
Yeah... your nose is bleeding.

Poates reaches for his HANDKERCHIEF and puts it to his face,
wiping off the blood. The MORNING BELL rings.

INT. COLLEGIATE SCHOOL -- HALLWAY -- MOMENTS LATER

Norma walks hurriedly down the empty hallway. Her limp has
gotten worse as the morning grind has now begun.

INT. COLLEGIATE SCHOOL -- SCIENCE LAB -- MOMENTS LATER

Norma comes into her CLASSROOM... a SCIENCE LAB with SINKS
and BUNSEN BURNERS mounted in MARBLE TOP DESKS. Kids are
moving about... loud and rambunctious.

NORMA
Okay... everyone quiet down! Take
your seats!

Norma moves toward a stack of METAL TRAYS on her desk. Inside
of each tray is a BALL OF BLACK MUSH.

NORMA (CONT'D)
Today is the day many of you have
been eagerly awaiting. You get to
dissect owl pellets.

A MALE STUDENT (13) pumps his fist...

MALE STUDENT #1
Yes!

Norma sets an OWL PELLET down in front of a FEMALE STUDENT
(12). She looks at the owl pellet in disgust.

FEMALE STUDENT #1
This is so gross.

Norma sets a tray down in front of Charles.

CHARLES
Why do they call it an owl pellet?

A MALE STUDENT (12) next to him takes his tray from Norma.

MALE STUDENT #2
Because they shit out of their mouths.

NORMA
Hey... watch the language. You say another cuss word I've gotta send you to detention, okay?

MALE STUDENT #2
Sorry, Mrs. Lewis.

FEMALE STUDENT #1
Is it true?

NORMA
Is what true?

FEMALE STUDENT #1
That owls poo out of their mouths.

NORMA
Yes... this is true.

The classroom gasps in disgust... others laugh.

NORMA (CONT'D)
Grey forest owls feed upon field mice, squirrels and small birds. The owl will then regurgitate the bones and waste matter in a ball of black mucous. Inside this mucous you will likely find the entire skeleton of its prey.

Norma goes to the front of the room and lowers a SCREEN.

NORMA (CONT'D)
I'm going to show you a film about the digestive process of the owl, and how the owl pellet is formed.

The classroom whispers with excitement.

EXT. NASA LANGLEY RESEARCH CENTER -- ENTRANCE GATE -- MORNING

Arthur pulls through the ENTRANCE GATE at the NASA LANGLEY RESEARCH CENTER. He retrieves his BADGE from the dashboard and shows it to the guard.

EXT. NASA LANGLEY FACILITY -- MAIN STREET -- MOMENTS LATER

Arthur's car drives down MAIN STREET on the campus of the research center. The buildings are predominately drab, functional, one story brick structures.. surrounded by various GLOBE STRUCTURES and PIPE NETWORKS on manicured green lawns.

INT. NASA LANGLEY FACILITY -- CORRIDOR -- MOMENTS LATER

The CAMERA tracks with Arthur as he moves through the crowded corridor of one of the research buildings. He says hello to various colleagues along the way.

All of the men at the facility are dressed the same... with white shirts and TIES and POCKET PROTECTOR BADGES. The place resembles an all-male community college for young scientists.

INT. NASA LANGLEY FACILITY -- MEDIA ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Arthur eases his way into the small, crowded AUDITORIUM that serves as a MEDIA ROOM. A PRESS CONFERENCE is underway.

NORM CAHILL (40s), the VIKING PROJECT COORDINATOR, is standing at the podium. Next to him is an OVERHEAD PROJECTOR with maps and various schematics projected from it onto a LARGE SCREEN.

REPORTER #1

It's been five months since the Viking lander touched down on the surface of Mars. We've seen dozens of photographs of the rock covered surface... what can you now tell us about the tests you've been conducting? Is there any sign of life on the red planet?

Arthur takes a seat in the back of the auditorium.

CAHILL

Well... there are three separate tests that we've been conducting... Pyrolytic Release, Labeled Release and Gas Exchange. The first two tests, based on soil samples about 22 centimeters deep, came back negative... and the third is... still pending.

Cahill smiles. Laughter erupts from various parts of the auditorium.

REPORTER #1

Can you elaborate on test number three?

Cahill places a transparent MAP of the mars surface on the overhead projector and begins to draw on it with a WAX PENCIL.

CAHILL

The gas exchange experiment measures the production or uptake of CO₂, nitrogen, methane, hydrogen, and oxygen during the incubation of the martian soil sample.

REPORTER #2

Are you showing us all of the photos? Are there little green men up there?

Laughter from the press.

CAHILL

Well... there is a possibility that the planet abounds with chemical compounds produced by living systems. Their chemical nature, distribution and structural uniqueness could be used to argue the presence of microscopic living organisms on Mars.

As Cahill moves on to the next question... Arthur taps the reporter on the shoulder.

ARTHUR

It all comes down to water.

Arthur points to an OVERHEAD SATELLITE PHOTO of Utopia Planitia, a raised level of martian terrain in the vicinity of the site where VIKING II landed.

There are dry river-bed formations in the soil.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

If we find water beneath the surface... and the topographic maps of Utopia Planitia indicate that there were once rivers on the surface of the planet, it's possible that we'll eventually find evidence of life.

INT. COLLEGIATE SCHOOL -- SCIENCE LAB -- MOMENTS LATER

The OWL PELLET FILM is underway. Norma sits in the back of the class next to the projector. She crosses her legs... reaching for her foot... massaging it gently. She cringes... clearly in intense pain.

Charles looks back at her... noticing this. They make eye contact... and Charles turns back to the screen.

INT. NASA LANGLEY FACILITY -- CAHILL'S OFFICE -- MORNING

Arthur now sits across from Cahill in his office. Behind him is a window that overlooks a huge laboratory.

CAHILL
I'm sorry Arthur, but they've
denied your application to be
admitted into the astronaut
program.

Arthur looks crushed.

ARTHUR
I see.
(beat)
Can I ask why?

CAHILL
I'm sorry, son... but they don't
tell us why.

INT. NASA LANGLEY FACILITY -- LABORATORY -- LATER ON

The CAMERA tracks through a LARGE LABORATORY in the heart of one of the main buildings on the Langley campus.

Work tables assembled with LABORATORY EQUIPMENT and MACHINERY extend out into infinity as DOZENS OF YOUNG MEN, all dressed in similar white shirts with NASA ID BADGES move throughout, engaged in various tasks.

Arthur is standing at a LABORATORY TABLE with a WHITE MASK on. He is wearing a LAB COAT and GLASSES.

He pours PINK LIQUID onto the surface of a METAL PAN... filling it to the edges.

A colleague named WENDELL JAMES (29) walks over to see what he is doing.

ARTHUR
Are they really with-holding some
of the Mars photos?

WENDELL
I don't know, man. Jesus... what's
that smell?

ARTHUR
It's a salinic compound.

WENDELL
What are you making?

ARTHUR
Christmas present for Norma.

Arthur retrieves a WHITE CERAMIC MOLD. The mold has an
extrusion that is shaped like a WOMAN'S FOOT... only the end
of the foot is round and missing its toes, save for the PINKY
TOE.

WENDELL
A new prosthesis for her foot?

ARTHUR
Yep.

Arthur carefully impresses the MOLD of his wife's foot into
the pink goop... sealing the mold at the edges into the tray.

WENDELL
What did you change up this time?

ARTHUR
The compound they're developing for
the pilot chairs on the space
shuttle.

INT. COLLEGIATE SCHOOL -- SCIENCE LAB -- NEXT

INSERT: The BONES of a FIELD MOUSE have been re-assembled in
rough form within the tray... as the OWL PELLET has been
ripped apart.

The tray belongs to Charles, and he has grown tired of
dissecting the owl pellet.

He looks up to the head of the class and sees that Norma is
sitting up on her desk... filing her nails... waiting out the
last remaining minutes of the period.

CHARLES
Mrs. Lewis?

She raises her head.

NORMA

Hmmm?

CHARLES

What happened to your foot?

She just stares at him.

NORMA

What happened... to my foot?

CHARLES

Yeah.

(beat)

My friend... she saw you take your shoe off. She said... that there's something wrong with it.

The whole class goes silent. Norma begins to blush. She looks down at her right foot, hidden inside of a CLOSED-TOE SHOE.

NORMA

Well... it's a long story.

She looks at her watch.

NORMA (CONT'D)

We've got five minutes until second period.

She looks back at her class and sees that their curiosity has been piqued. She has no choice now but to tell them.

NORMA (CONT'D)

Alright... I'll tell you what happened to my foot.

INT. NASA LANGLEY FACILITY -- LABORATORY -- NEXT

Arthur sits at the table with Wendell... waiting for the MOLD to dry. Arthur is dealing a deck of cards as they begin a game of GIN RUMMY.

ARTHUR

When she was seventeen... still living in Texas, her brother dropped a barbell on her foot... broke three of her toes.

INT. COLLEGIATE SCHOOL -- SCIENCE LAB -- NEXT

The CAMERA pans across the faces of STUDENTS as they listen to her tell the story.

NORMA

And so I go to see the doctor. He goes to take an X-ray of my foot to see if the bones are broken.

INT. NASA LANGLEY FACILITY -- LABORATORY -- NEXT

Arthur discards... then retrieves a replacement card from the stack.

ARTHUR

So this dumb-ass Richmond doctor takes the x-ray... then he goes to check on another patient down the hall.

Arthur discards a king.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

This dumb-ass... he left the x-ray machine on.

WENDELL

Jesus. That's not good.

INT. COLLEGIATE SCHOOL -- SCIENCE LAB -- NEXT

Norma raises up her right shoe to show the class.

NORMA

They found out that the tissue in four of my toes had been completely destroyed by the radiation.

Norma swivels around on the desk and places her right foot against her left inner thigh.

NORMA (CONT'D)

So they have to amputate four of my toes. And then they had to take a bunch of skin from my inner thigh to cover the front of my foot. This is back in 1963... so they didn't have the skin graft techniques they do now.

INT. NASA LANGLEY FACILITY -- LABORATORY -- NEXT

Arthur stands up and takes his RIGHT FOOT... pulls it up and touches it to his LEFT INNER THIGH.

ARTHUR
She had to sit there in a hospital bed in the same position for six months, waiting for it to heal.

Wendell stares at the mold on the laboratory table.

WENDELL
Jesus. I hope she sued this idiot.

ARTHUR
Oh yeah. Her family sued. They won.

WENDELL
What was the settlement?

ARTHUR
Forty thousand dollars.

Arthur pulls the ceramic mold out of the pink goop... and we see the IMPRESSION of her disfigured foot inside the new PROSTHESIS.

INT. COLLEGIATE SCHOOL -- SCIENCE LAB -- NEXT

Norma turns around and uncrosses her legs. They now dangle over the edge of the lab desk.

NORMA
You guys want to see it? Now that the secret is out... I don't want you spreading rumors about my mangled foot.

The class responds enthusiastically.

NORMA (CONT'D)
Come on... gather round... take a look at the freak show.

As the kids gather around... Norma removes her right shoe and reveals her disfigured foot... missing every toe but her pinky. A rounded piece of SCAR TISSUE covers the rest of it.

INT. NASA LANGLEY FACILITY -- LABORATORY -- NEXT

Arthur takes the trimmed PROSTHESIS and wraps it in tissue paper, then places it in a CARDBOARD BOX with a red bow on it.

ARTHUR
If this sucker works... she can
start jogging again.

INT. COLLEGIATE SCHOOL -- HALLWAY -- MIDDAY

Dana walks up to Walter as he stands in front of his locker.

DANA
I'm sorry I said that her foot
looked gross.

WALTER
It doesn't look gross... it looks
cool. And if you can't tell the
difference between gross and
cool... then I feel sorry for you,
Dana.

Walter walks off... leaving her alone.

EXT. LEWIS HOUSE -- AFTERNOON

Norma emerges from her car carrying GROCERY BAGS in both arms. Walter comes out of the garage with his bike.

NORMA
Hey honey.

WALTER
Why do I need a baby-sitter?

NORMA
Because you're nine years old.
You're not a geezer yet.

WALTER
It's 1976, mom. Times are changing.
Nine years old isn't what it used
to be. I think I'm ready to get a
moped.

NORMA
We're not buying you a moped,
Walter. Stick with the bike... and
be home before dark.

WALTER

Fine.

Walter rides off down the street.

INT. LEWIS HOUSE -- FOYER -- NEXT

Norma comes into the foyer, groceries in hand. The PHONE is ringing.

INT. LEWIS HOUSE -- KITCHEN -- NEXT

Norma comes into the kitchen, sets the groceries down on the kitchen table. She grabs the phone off the wall and puts it to her ear.

NORMA

Hello?

There is silence on the other end of the line.

NORMA (CONT'D)

Hello?

A MOMENT OF SILENCE... then the caller disconnects.

Norma hangs up the phone and starts unloading the groceries. The box sits on the table... but she takes no notice of it.

EXT. GYMNASIUM -- EARLY EVENING

Arthur emerges from a NASA CAMPUS GYMNASIUM into the twilight with Wendell. Both are covered in sweat, dressed in gym clothes. Arthur is carrying his BASKETBALL and a gym bag.

WENDELL

How's the commute back to Richmond?

ARTHUR

Not too bad. Maybe an hour and twenty minutes.

WENDELL

Tell Norma I said hello.

Wendell watches him walk across the lawn to the parking lot... approaching his car. *He lights a cigarette and takes a drag... then looks at his watch.*

INSERT: His watch shows that it is 4:58 PM.

INT. LEWIS HOUSE -- FAMILY ROOM -- NEXT

Norma sits on the couch... smoking a CIGARETTE. On the TELEVISION... the LOCAL NEWS is playing.

The DOORBELL rings.

INT. LEWIS HOUSE -- FOYER -- NEXT

Norma opens the front door.

A man named ARLINGTON STEWARD (40) is standing there, his body is turned in profile. He is wearing a crisp wool suit and a BLACK HAT, with a BRIEFCASE in his right hand.

ARLINGTON
Mrs. Lewis?

NORMA
Yeah.

ARLINGTON
My name is Arlington Steward.

Her eyes light up, as she remembers the name and the box.

Arlington then rotates his body... revealing the RIGHT SIDE of his face. Norma's eyes widen in horror at what she sees.

Nearly all of the right side of his face from his cheekbone to his lower jaw has been burned away. His rear MOLARS and GUMS are exposed beneath the absence of tissue that is supposed to conceal them.

Norma immediately feels a strange connection... a deep sympathy for him and the pain he must have endured.

ARLINGTON (CONT'D)
I assume you received the box that
I left on your doorstep.

His speech has a slight impediment from the burn that extends to the right side of his mouth.

NORMA
Oh, yes. Yes we did.

ARLINGTON
And you retrieved the button unit
inside of the box.

Norma smiles. He smiles back at her.

NORMA
The button unit. That's what you
call it?

ARLINGTON
Indeed. May I come in?

NORMA
Sure.

Norma turns and leads him back into the kitchen. She
retrieves the button unit from the table.

NORMA (CONT'D)
So what is this thing? I assume
you're trying to sell me something?

ARLINGTON
Well... in a way, yes. I do have an
offer to make.

NORMA
Yeah? What are you selling?

ARLINGTON
A financial opportunity.

Arlington gestures toward the table with his briefcase.

ARLINGTON (CONT'D)
May I?

She nods. He places the briefcase down on the table.

He takes the button unit from her and sets it down on the
kitchen table. They both sit down.

He then withdraws a SMALL YELLOW ENVELOPE from his suit
jacket pocket.

ARLINGTON (CONT'D)
Inside of this envelope is a key.

Arlington opens the envelope and withdraws a small METAL KEY.

ARLINGTON (CONT'D)
This is the key that opens the
glass dome of the button unit.

Arlington then inserts the key into a small HORIZONTAL SLOT
at the top edge. He turns the key, and the LID that houses
the GLASS DOME pops loose.

The METAL BUTTON is now exposed.

ARLINGTON (CONT'D)

If you push the button, one of two things will happen.

(beat)

First, someone... somewhere in the world... who you do not know... will die.

Norma just stares at him.

ARLINGTON (CONT'D)

Then, you will receive a payment of two-hundred thousand dollars... tax free.

Arlington opens the briefcase. Inside are neatly stacked rows of ONE-HUNDRED DOLLAR BILLS.

ARLINGTON (CONT'D)

The money will be delivered to you in cash.

Norma covers her mouth... shocked at the sight of so much money.

NORMA

Are you for real?

Arlington smiles back at her.

ARLINGTON

Mrs. Lewis, I can assure you that the offer is real.

NORMA

Who do you work for?

ARLINGTON

The guarantee of payment has several restrictions. One... I am not permitted to disclose any information about to the identity of my employers.

(beat)

Two... if you discuss the details of this financial opportunity with anyone other than your husband, the offer is null and void, and you will not receive the money in return for having pushed the button.

(beat)

Three... you have twenty four hours.

Arlington glances at his watch.

ARLINGTON (CONT'D)

You have until five o'clock tomorrow evening to make your decision whether or not to push the button. At that time, I will return to retrieve the button unit from you. It will be re-programmed and the offer will be made to someone else.

Arlington places the key back into the envelope, seals it with crisp precision, and hands it over to her.

He then closes the briefcase and stands up to leave.

ARLINGTON (CONT'D)

Until then... a good day to you,
Mrs. Lewis.

He nods his head and turns toward the foyer.

INT. LEWIS HOUSE -- FOYER -- NEXT

She follows him toward the front door.

NORMA

Wait a minute... you're just going to leave me with this thing.

(baffled)

Is this some kind of joke? Who are you?

He opens the front door and turns back to her with a friendly smile.

ARLINGTON

My name is Arlington Steward, and I can assure you that this is no joke. The offer is real, but I am not at liberty to disclose any more information than I already have.

He withdraws a BUSINESS CARD and hands it to her.

ARLINGTON (CONT'D)

Good day.

He heads down the walk toward his car.

She looks down at the card and sees that his name is printed in an embossed BLACK FONT:

ARLINGTON STEWARD

She turns the card over and sees what looks like a PHONE NUMBER printed on the back:

8 0 4 7 9 4 1 7 7 9

She stands there in the doorway and watches him step into the automobile, start the engine and drive off.

EXT. CARYTOWN SHOPPING CENTER -- AFTERNOON

Walter is sitting on a bench in front of a line of shops in CARYTOWN. Dana approaches him.

He turns to face her.

WALTER
What do you want?

DANA
I'm sorry. I just wanted to tell you... that I think your mom is beautiful.

Walter just stares at her in silence... wanting to forgive her.

INT. LEWIS HOUSE -- KITCHEN -- NEXT

Norma walks back into the kitchen, holding the key envelope in one hand and the business card in the other.

She stares at them both, then down at the box. She then retrieves the key from the envelope and inserts it into the slot, opening the glass dome.

She stares at the button for a long moment... then closes the dome. She closes her eyes... trying to make sense of what has just transpired.

INT. BURNS HOUSE -- NEXT

The CAMERA zooms out from a RINGING PHONE that sits on a KITCHEN COUNTER in a large suburban house. SUSAN BURNS (50s) goes to answer the phone.

SUSAN
Hello?

NORMA (PHONE)
Hey mom.

SUSAN
Hey honey. What's up?

NORMA (PHONE)
Nothing... I just...

The CAMERA continues to zoom out, revealing her husband, JIM BURNS (50s) laid out in a recliner, watching television.

SUSAN
 Is something wrong?

INT. LEWIS HOUSE -- KITCHEN -- NEXT

Norma stares at the business card.

NORMA
 No... something just happened
 and...

SUSAN (PHONE)
 What?

NORMA
 Nothing. I don't want to talk about
 it right now.

INT. BURNS HOUSE -- FAMILY ROOM -- NEXT

Susan carries the phone into the family room

SUSAN
 Alright.
 (covering the phone)
 Jim... you gotta get ready.

JIM
 Alright.

He sits up and moves toward the stairs.

SUSAN
 Wait until you see the spread
 tonight.

INT. LEWIS HOUSE -- KITCHEN -- NEXT

Norma twirls the phone cord around her finger.

NORMA
 Hmmm. I think they're spending more
 on their wedding than we did on our
 house.

SUSAN (PHONE)
Is your foot acting up again?

Norma leans against the wall... lifting her right foot off the floor to ease the pain.

NORMA
A little, yeah. That damn bone. The skin from my leg, it's not as tough as it should be.

SUSAN (PHONE)
You know he's gonna be there tonight.

NORMA
Who?

SUSAN
Dr. Stupid.

Norma takes this in... remembering...

NORMA
Well... it's been what... thirteen years? Bound to run into each other at some point, right?

INT. LEWIS HOUSE -- MASTER BATHROOM -- LATER ON

Norma is now wearing only her BRA AND PANTIES, her hair and make-up flawless. She finishes putting on a pair of DIAMOND EARRINGS.

As she steps into an elegant COCKTAIL DRESS... we see the deep square shaped SCARS on the inside of her LEFT THIGH.

INT. LEWIS HOUSE -- MASTER BEDROOM -- NEXT

Norma comes into the bedroom... and ARTHUR is there... putting on his CUFF LINKS. He is dressed in a TUXEDO.

His jacket is laid out on the bed, and next to it is his CHRISTMAS PRESENT. Norma sees it.

NORMA
What's this?

ARTHUR
A little gift from Dr. Rex Morgan.

She opens the present and retrieves the PROSTHESIS.

NORMA
Oh my god!

Norma removes an old, store-bought INSOLE from her right shoe and inserts the new one.

ARTHUR
It's a material they developed for the new shuttle chairs. It'll absorb the pressure of your foot and re-distribute it across the entire surface area.

She then slides her disfigured foot into the shoe... and begins to walk around the room.

NORMA
Oh my God, Rex... how'd you do it?

ARTHUR
I just figured out a way to make it better.

She crosses the room and gives him a hug and a kiss.

NORMA
I don't know what I'd do without you.

ARTHUR
Merry Christmas, June.

INT. LEWIS HOUSE -- FAMILY ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Norma and Arthur come into the family room, wearing their winter coats. Walter is sitting across the coffee table with Dana. They are playing CARDS.

The box is sitting between them.

WALTER
Did Mr. Steward show up?

Norma sees the box sitting there and immediately grabs it off the table.

ARTHUR
Yeah... what's it all about. Did he show up?

NORMA
Yeah... I'll tell you about it in the car. We're running late.

Norma leans down and kisses Walter on the cheek.

NORMA (CONT'D)
We'll be home late... your bedtime
is ten.

Dana watches them go... her eyes transfixed on the box in
Norma's hands.

EXT. RIVER ROAD -- NIGHT

The CAMERA tracks with Arthur's car as it drives south on
CARY STREET... approaching an intersection.

INT. ARTHUR'S CAR -- NEXT

Norma has the box sitting in her lap while Arthur drives.

NORMA
And before I could ask him anything
else... he got in his car... and he
pulled off.

ARTHUR
Did you get the license plate?

NORMA
No.

ARTHUR
Your dad is cop, Norma. Always get
the license plate number.

NORMA
I was little overwhelmed, Arthur.

ARTHUR
Somewhere in the world... someone
you do not know will die.

NORMA
Those were his exact words.

ARTHUR
Did he say how they would die?

NORMA
No.

ARTHUR
And he showed you the cash.

NORMA
Yeah. He said it was two-hundred
thousand. It looked real to me.

ARTHUR
What did he look like?

NORMA
You don't want to know. I think
he's a burn victim. Poor thing...
half of his face is gone.

ARTHUR
Really?

NORMA
I think maybe he's a life insurance
salesman. Maybe that's what it is.
It's some kind of survey. We push
the button and he offers us a
discount on a two-hundred thousand
dollar life insurance policy.
Joke's on us.

EXT. COUNTRY CLUB OF VIRGINIA -- NIGHT

The CAMERA descends upon the COUNTRY CLUB OF VIRGINIA. It is
a MASSIVE COLONIAL MANSION that sits upon a huge hill that is
littered with CHRISTMAS LUMINARIES that glow in the night.

EXT. C.C.V. -- PARKING LOT -- NIGHT

We approach Arthur's car as they pull into a PARKING SPACE in
front of the main entrance.

INT. ARTHUR'S CAR -- NEXT

Arthur grabs the box from off her lap.

ARTHUR
Did you bring the key with you?

She hands it to him.

He takes the key and inserts it... opening the glass dome.

He then takes his INDEX FINGER and places it on the button.

NORMA
What the hell are you doing?!

ARTHUR
(playful)
I was gonna push the button.

NORMA
No!

Norma reaches over and snaps the dome closed.

ARTHUR
You think it's for real.

She takes the box back from him.

NORMA
I don't know. He was... he seemed very sure of himself. If it's some kind of survey... then... he's a really good salesman because I believe him. I believe that he might give us that money.

ARTHUR
Do then you think he's a maniac and he might go kill someone?

NORMA
I don't know.

Arthur takes the box back from her. He shakes it... then flips it over. He sees that there is a SINGLE SCREW on the bottom corner that holds it together.

ARTHUR
Open the glove compartment. There's a philips head screwdriver in there.

She opens the GLOVE COMPARTMENT and retrieves a PHILLIPS HEAD SCREWDRIVER for him.

NORMA
What are you doing?

Arthur is now unscrewing the bottom of the box.

ARTHUR
I'm gonna see what's inside of it.

He removes the screw... and sees that the wooden base rotates on a ROD MOUNT on the opposite corner.

INSIDE... it is completely empty.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
Nothing... no transmitter... no radio. If we pushed the button right now... he'd have no way of knowing.

She takes the box from him and closes the dome.

EXT. C.C.V. -- PARKING LOT -- MOMENTS LATER

Arthur pops open the trunk and Norma places the box inside.

He shuts the trunk and they begin to walk toward the entrance to the COUNTRY CLUB. Arthur then holds out his hand to his wife.

ARTHUR
Let me hold the key.

NORMA
Why do you get to hold it?

ARTHUR
Because you'll lose it Norma. You can't hold your liquor.

NORMA
Neither can you.

ARTHUR
What if someone takes your purse? I have pockets. Let me hold it.

NORMA
Fine.

Norma goes through her purse and hands the small envelope to him. They move toward the entrance to the country club.

INT. C.C.V. -- GRAND BALLROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

The CAMERA follows Norma and Arthur into the GRAND BALLROOM of the country club. There are several hundred people there... all dressed in black tie. A MASSIVE CHRISTMAS TREE sits in the center of the room, surrounded by tables.

A PIANO PLAYER plays CHRISTMAS CAROLS up on the stage.

NORMA
Jesus. All this for a rehearsal dinner... Deborah is so lucky. Remember our rehearsal dinner?

ARTHUR
Yeah. Keg party in our back yard.

Susan and Jim are standing with ARTHUR LEWIS, SR (50s) and BEV LEWIS (50s). Arthur and Norma go over to greet them.

The CAMERA drifts over to a PLACARD that reads:

DEBORAH ANNE BURNS - EDWARD REED POWELL

REHEARSAL DINNER RECEPTION

INT. LEWIS HOUSE -- FAMILY ROOM -- NEXT

Dana enters the family room and hands a package to Walter.

DANA
Merry Christmas...

Walter takes the package and begins to remove the wrapping paper.

Inside is a COMIC BOOK. He pulls it out of the wrapping... and on the cover is an illustration of a DARK FIGURE walking upon a RED DESERT SURFACE.

The title is: THE MAN FROM MARS

Walter looks at the cover in awe.

WALTER
Thanks Dana. My dad is gonna love this.

INT. C.C.V. -- GRAND BALLROOM -- LATER ON

Norma and Arthur are now seated around a table with both sets of parents. Bev is running her hand through Arthur's long hair.

BEV
When are you gonna cut this hair?

ARTHUR
Never.

BEV
(to Norma)
Are you still cutting his hair?

NORMA
Uh-huh.

ARTHUR SR.
Are you Leonard or Skynard?

BEV
Well honey... they're never gonna let you into outer space with these sideburns.

SUSAN
They're all wearing them that way now, Bev.

NATHAN BURNS (26), Norma's wheelchair-bound younger brother, comes rolling up.

NATHAN
Outer space? Is someone planning on
departing the surface of the earth?

ARTHUR
Nathan!

Arthur stands up and gives him a hug.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
It's been years. How have you been?

NATHAN
I've been better... I mean, I used
to have legs...

The table goes silent... Susan looks as though she might start to cry.

NATHAN (CONT'D)
Sorry... morbid humor. What's this
talk about outer space?

NORMA
Arthur has been working at Nasa.

JIM
He helped design the camera that
photographed the Mars surface.

Arthur puts his hands on the back of Nathan's wheelchair.

ARTHUR
Nathan and I are gonna go grab a
drink...

He begins to wheel Nathan toward the bar.

NORMA
Arthur made me a new prosthesis for
my foot. Some space age formula...
it's incredible.

JIM
Can he make Nathan a pair of
prosthetic legs?

INT. C.C.V. -- GRAND BALLROOM -- BAR -- MOMENTS LATER

Arthur now sits with Nathan over by the bar.

NATHAN

Can you believe it? I survive
eighteen months crawling through
the Vietnam jungle ... and not one
bullet so much as grazes my body.

(beat)

And I come home, take a few tabs of
LSD at a Grateful Dead show and
wrap my car around a tree.

Arthur doesn't know how to respond.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Pretty damn sad... losing the legs
that way, but I always thought it
was Karmic retribution for what I
did to Norma.

ARTHUR

What'd you ever do to Norma?

NATHAN

I dropped that barbell on her foot
when we were kids. That's why she
went to get that x-ray. If it
wasn't for me... she'd still have
all her toes.

ARTHUR

You can't think of it that way.

NATHAN

Why not? It's the truth.

ARTHUR

You didn't leave the x-ray machine
on, Dr. Stupid did.

NATHAN

Yeah, but my mistake sent her to
Dr. Stupid... so that makes me
culpable in the eyes of Buddha.

ARTHUR

You're no more culpable than the
company that manufactured the
barbell. Stop punishing yourself.

Nathan smiles in appreciation and takes a long swig of Jack
Daniels.

NATHAN

You know he's here.

ARTHUR

Who?

NATHAN
Dr. Stupid.

Nathan nods his head across the room... where DR. EARL STUPE (50s) is seated at a table with his wife.

NATHAN (CONT'D)
Dr. Earl Stupe. He's still got a
practice over on the west end.

Arthur looks over at him... for a moment they make brief eye contact... and Stupe quickly looks away.

INT. C.C.V. -- GRAND BALLROOM -- NEXT

Susan is now staring at Dr. Stupe. They are joined by DEBORAH BURNS (24), Norma's younger sister and bride-to-be.

SUSAN
I wonder if he even recognizes us.

JIM
I'm sure he does.

DEBORAH
I can't believe they still let him
practice medicine.

NORMA
You gotta let it go. You gotta
learn to forgive and forget.

SUSAN
I'd be willing to forgive him if he
would've just admitted his
negligence under oath. The bastard
lied... said it was the x-ray
machine that malfunctioned.

SENATOR GRIFFITH POWELL (50s) and his son EDWARD POWELL (20s), approach. Edward is the husband-to-be.

SUSAN (CONT'D)
Well Senator! You look very spiffy
tonight!

POWELL
Now that the mid-term elections are
over... the smile lines are
starting to fade.

Powell puts on a fake smile, grabs Jim's hand and they both wave... poking fun at politician behavior.

SUSAN
Well... we all voted!

Powell looks over at Norma.

POWELL
Norma... right?

NORMA
That's right.

He shakes her hand... fascinated by her.

POWELL
And you're married to the aspiring astronaut.

NORMA
That's right. There he is right over there.

She points over to Arthur the bar. Powell looks over at him... and they briefly make eye contact.

INT. LEWIS HOUSE -- FAMILY ROOM -- NEXT

Dana and Walter are sitting on the floor, playing MONOPOLY.

DANA
Walter?

WALTER
Yeah?

DANA
Will you take me down to the basement? I want to see your dad's darkroom.

INT. LEWIS HOUSE -- BASEMENT -- MOMENTS LATER

Dana and Walter come down the stairs into the BASEMENT of the house. RED LIGHT envelops the room. There are two long wooden WORK BENCHES running down the middle.

There are a series of BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOGRAPHS hanging from a wire. Each one shows a different view of the surface of MARS.

DANA
Is that Mars?

WALTER
Yep.

DANA

What did your dad have to do with the Viking?

WALTER

He helped design the camera.

Walter points to a PLASTIC PROTOTYPE MODEL of the VIKING LANDER mounted on a third WORK BENCH at the end of the room. A model of the MARS SURFACE has been re-created and painted with exacting detail.

WALTER (CONT'D)

He's making the model for the science museum.

Walter points to one of TWO CAMERAS mounted on the front of the SPIDER-SHAPED LANDING MODULE. The camera is cylindrical and features a VERTICAL SLOT on the front.

WALTER (CONT'D)

They designed the camera to photograph in 360 degrees. It scans in the image one line at a time... and takes about five minutes to complete one revolution.

DANA

How do they get the images back to earth?

WALTER

Radio transmission. They figured out a way to interpret the scan lines and then print them onto film.

DANA

How long does it take to transmit back to earth?

WALTER

About ten hours.

Dana looks over at the wall and sees a NEW YORK TIMES FRONT PAGE from September with a large image of MARS on it.

WALTER (CONT'D)

They tested the camera in the parking lot at Langley last year.

Walter points to another FRAMED PHOTOGRAPH on the wall. In the black & white photograph, we see a group of FIFTY NASA EMPLOYEES assembled in a long line in a PARKING LOT.

Walter points to his father standing in the group.

WALTER (CONT'D)

There's my dad.

He moves his finger across the line of smiling faces...
ARTHUR appears for a SECOND TIME in the row.

WALTER (CONT'D)

And there he is again.

Walter then moves his finger down toward the right side of
the photo... ARTHUR LEWIS appears for a third time.

WALTER (CONT'D)

And there he is again.

Dana looks close at the photo.

DANA

How'd he do that?

WALTER

Because the camera takes five
minutes to scan in 360 degrees, he
waited until the camera passed over
him then jumped ahead in the
circle.

The CAMERA moves in closer to the photograph... to the THIRD
VERSION of ARTHUR LEWIS.

DANA

Your dad sounds pretty clever.

WALTER

My dad is more than just clever,
Dana. My dad is the coolest man who
ever walked the face of the earth.

The CAMERA ZOOMS in close to Arthur's face... then tips down
to another MAN kneeling on the pavement directly below him.

*It is ARLINGTON STEWARD... smiling at the camera. His face is
normal... no evidence of any burn visible...*

INT. C.C.V. -- GRAND BALLROOM -- NIGHT

Norma and Arthur are now DANCING among a group of people in
front of the stage the stage, where a WOMAN SINGER is
performing WHITE CHRISTMAS.

NORMA

Two-hundred thousand dollars is a
lot of money, Arthur.

ARTHUR

What would we do with that kind of money?

NORMA

We could get out of Richmond... move to California.

ARTHUR

Then we could cross the border into Mexico if they ever came after us.

NORMA

You can't arrest someone for pushing a button, Arthur. It's not a weapon. It's not a gun. We wouldn't be culpable... not in a court of law.

ARTHUR

What if it's someone's baby?

NORMA

What if it's some murderer on death row in China?

ARTHUR

What if it's our neighbor across the street. Do you know our neighbors across the street? Have you ever met them?

NORMA

Yeah. Doug and Donna.

ARTHUR

Hmmm. I haven't met Doug or Donna.

(beat)

What does it mean to officially know someone, anyway? Do you know me, Norma?

NORMA

I know you better than you know yourself.

ARTHUR

Do you know Walter?

NORMA

Even better than I know you.

They spin around on the dance floor.

ARTHUR

It's just a stupid prank, Norma.

NORMA
Life insurance.

Arthur gazes across the ballroom toward the bar. Nathan sits there alone... finishing his drink.

EXT. C.C.V. -- PARKING LOT --LATER THAT NIGHT

Arthur and Norma watch as Jim hoists Nathan up into their VAN with a HYDRAULIC LIFT. He is passed out drunk.

Behind him... Dr. Stupe is waiting in line at the valet for his car. *He and Norma make eye contact. His eyes dart down to the pavement as he steps into his car.*

INT. LEWIS HOUSE -- FAMILY ROOM -- LATER ON

Norma and Arthur come into the family room. Dana is asleep on the couch. Norma sets the box down on the coffee table and goes to wake Dana.

NORMA
Dana...

Dana's eyes slowly open.

NORMA (CONT'D)
Arthur will drive you home, okay?

DANA
I have my bike... and my house isn't far from here.

NORMA
Where's Walter?

DANA
He's asleep upstairs.

Arthur hands Dana a ten dollar bill.

ARTHUR
Are you sure you don't need a ride?

DANA
I'm sure.

ARTHUR
Good night, Dana.

Dana exits through the front door. Norma stands up and moves toward the foyer.

NORMA
Can you turn off the Christmas tree
lights?

ARTHUR
I like leaving them on.

NORMA
It's a fire hazard.

ARTHUR
It keeps the Christmas spirit alive
while we sleep.

NORMA
We could die.

ARTHUR
Everyone dies eventually, Norma.

She stares at the tree.

NORMA
Fine. Leave them on.

She goes upstairs... leaving him alone with the glowing tree.

Arthur looks down at the coffee table. The box sits there...
taunting him. He retrieves the KEY ENVELOPE from his pocket
and stares at it.

He then walks over to the wall and unplugs the Christmas tree
lights.

INT. LEWIS HOUSE -- MASTER BEDROOM -- LATER THAT NIGHT

Norma and Arthur lay in bed, facing in opposite directions.
Neither of them can sleep.

Arthur rolls over and wraps his arm around her.

INT. LEWIS HOUSE -- WALTER'S BEDROOM -- NEXT

The CAMERA approaches Walter's bed. He has made a TENT under
the covers. A light glows from inside.

UNDER THE COVERS... Walter has a flashlight and he is reading
the comic book.

INSERT: Various illustrations from the comic... a HUGE TEMPLE
with a massive flying beast flying above it. A METEOR
hurtling toward EARTH...

INT. CARYTOWN HAIR SALON -- EARLY MORNING

At the CARYTOWN HAIR SALON... the CAMERA zooms out from Norma as she sits under a DOME, drying her hair. Next to her is her sister Deborah and several other BRIDESMAIDS for the wedding.

The other women are gabbing... reading fashion magazines. Norma seems lost in her own world.

EXT. CARYTOWN HAIR SALON -- LATER ON

Norma and Deborah emerge from the hair salon with the others in tow. Lurking down at the end of the sidewalk is Bud Wall, Walter's bus-driver.

The huge man watches them intensely.

INT. LEWIS HOUSE -- KITCHEN -- NEXT

Norma has Arlington's BUSINESS CARD out. She stares at the number. Arthur comes in with the morning paper.

The box sits on the kitchen table. She retrieves the key and inserts it into the slot... opening the glass dome. Arthur comes into the kitchen.

NORMA

We'll never see that much money.

ARTHUR

Why do you say that?

NORMA

Be realistic Arthur... you work for the government.

ARTHUR

Maybe not forever.

NORMA

We'll never leave Richmond.

ARTHUR

Do you want to move?

NORMA

We have to put Walter in public school.

ARTHUR

Why?

NORMA
Collegiate withdrew the faculty
tuition discount.

ARTHUR
No...

NORMA
Yeah. They did.
(beat)
Even if we sold my car and moved
into a smaller house, we couldn't
afford that school.

ARTHUR
No...

NORMA
We'd have to enroll him at
Hopewell. Unless...

ARTHUR
Unless what, Norma?

She reaches out and holds her finger over the button...
thinking. She then picks up the business card with her other
hand, flips it over and stares at the number.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
Are you gonna call him?

NORMA
Yeah.

Norma begins to dial the number on the card.

EXT. WILLOW LAWN MOTEL -- NEXT

The CAMERA cranes down into the WILLOW LAWN MOTEL on the
north side of Richmond. The two-story building has a SWIMMING
POOL adjacent to south side.

INT. WILLOW LAWN MOTEL -- ROOM 234 -- NEXT

The CAMERA zooms out from a RINGING TELEPHONE that sits on
the bedside table.

Arlington sits on the bed... staring silently at the wall. He
picks up the receiver and places it to his ear.

ARLINGTON
Hello Mrs. Lewis.

INT. LEWIS HOUSE -- KITCHEN -- NEXT

Norma pauses for a moment... wondering how he could have known it was her.

NORMA
Is this Mr. Steward?

ARLINGTON (PHONE)
Of course it is.

NORMA
How did you know it was me... are you tracing this call?

ARLINGTON (PHONE)
Time is running out... have you made your decision?

Norma looks to Arthur... who paces around the kitchen.

NORMA
If we push the button... are you going to murder someone?

INT. WILLOW LAWN MOTEL -- ROOM 234 -- NEXT

Arlington leans back on the motel room bed.

ARLINGTON
When you push the button... somewhere in this world... someone you do not know... will die. I never mentioned the word murder.

NORMA (PHONE)
How will they die?

ARLINGTON
I'm not at liberty to disclose that information. Besides... it would spoil the fun.

NORMA (PHONE)
Are you selling life insurance?

ARLINGTON
I am not at liberty to disclose any information about my employers. I can only remind you that the offer is real...
(looking at his watch)
...and it expires in approximately eight hours.

NORMA (PHONE)
*Why do you do this? What do you get
 out of this deal?*

ARLINGTON
 Absolutely nothing. The reward is
 for you.

INT. LEWIS HOUSE -- KITCHEN -- NEXT

Norma paces around with the phone.

ARLINGTON (PHONE)
*Is there anything else, Mrs. Lewis?
 I have an appointment to make and I
 don't want to be late.*

NORMA
 Can we meet in person? I'd like to
 see you... before we make our final
 decision.

ARLINGTON
*Why... I'm looking at you right
 now, Norma.*

NORMA
 Excuse me?

ARLINGTON
*The grey spotted owl... in your
 back yard.*

Norma turns and looks out the large picture window in the
 kitchen nook. Outside in the back yard, an OWL is perched on
 a planter.

The large bird sits motionless... its large SAUCER EYES do
 not blink.

Norma stares at it for a long moment... transfixed. Arthur
 paces around the kitchen... facing in the other direction.

Outside... the owl flies away before Arthur notices it.

NORMA
 Hello?

There is no response.

NORMA (CONT'D)
 Mr. Steward? Are you still there?

Norma hangs up the phone. She stares at the box... then at
 her husband, as he sits down across from her.

ARTHUR
What do you want to do Norma?

NORMA
We're gonna have to pull Walter out
of that school.

ARTHUR
Then push it.
(taunting)
Push the button, Norma... push the
button. I dare you. I double-dog
diddly dare you.

NORMA
I'm scared to.

ARTHUR
Well... if you don't push it...
then I will.
(beat)
This is stupid.

Arthur reaches out to push the button... but she grabs his
wrist with her left hand, restraining him.

NORMA
Ladies first.

*She then reaches out and presses down on the button with her
index finger.*

INT. RICHMOND POLICE STATION -- 911 EMERGENCY -- NEXT

The CAMERA tracks along a series of CUBICLES at the POLICE
STATION in downtown Richmond. A FEMALE OPERATOR sits at each
cubicle...

OPERATOR #1
911 emergency... how may I direct
your call?

The CAMERA moves in closer...

OPERATOR #1 (CONT'D)
Excuse me? You need to slow down...
I can't understand what you're
saying.

She listens to the voice on the other end of the line.

OPERATOR #1 (CONT'D)
So you heard loud screaming and
then a gun shot.
(beat)
(MORE)

OPERATOR #1 (CONT'D)
What is your address?
(beat)
1500 Cary Street.

EXT. 1500 CARY STREET -- MOMENTS LATER

Two POLICE CARS pull up with their SIRENS blaring in front of a TOWNHOUSE on Cary Street. TWO POLICE OFFICERS emerge from each car and approach the front of the townhouse.

They begin to bang loudly on the door. A FEMALE NEIGHBOR (20s) emerges from the townhouse next door.

NEIGHBOR
(distraught)
I heard a gunshot... then he ran
out the front door and got in his
car.

The POLICE OFFICER looks at his partner and then proceeds to KICK DOWN the door.

INT. 1500 CARY STREET -- FOYER -- NEXT

The OFFICERS move through the townhouse with their GUNS drawn. The SCREAMING of a YOUNG GIRL can be heard from upstairs.

INT. 1500 CARY STREET -- KITCHEN -- NEXT

The OFFICERS enter the kitchen. A WOMAN (20s) named AMY BEVILACQUA is slumped over on the kitchen floor in a pool of blood.

The CAMERA moves in toward her face.

INT. 1500 CARY STREET -- UPSTAIRS HALLWAY -- NEXT

An OFFICER approaches the BATHROOM DOOR at the end of the hall. The screaming girl from inside is bawling her eyes out.

The Officer sees a tiny HAND emerge from underneath the door. She is reaching out for help. He goes to open the door, but there is a LARGE DEAD BOLT LOCK mounted on the outside.

OFFICER #1
Honey... I need you to back away
from the door... I'M GONNA HAVE TO
KICK IT DOWN!

The screaming begins to subside.

OFFICER #1 (CONT'D)
BACK AWAY FROM THE DOOR!

FEMALE VOICE
Okay...

The Officer then kicks the door down.

INT. 1500 CARY STREET -- UPSTAIRS BATHROOM -- NEXT

Inside the bathroom... a YOUNG GIRL (7) is cowering in the bathtub... *hyperventilating*...

INT. LEWIS HOUSE -- KITCHEN -- NEXT

Norma and Arthur are sitting across from one another in silence. There is an empty BOTTLE OF WINE on the table.

ARTHUR
There's no turning back now.

Seconds later... *THE DOORBELL RINGS*.

Both Norma and Arthur jump in their seats.

INT. LEWIS HOUSE -- FOYER -- NEXT

Norma and Arthur move toward the front door. Norma puts her eye to the PEEPHOLE. Arlington's disfigured face stares back at her.

She opens the door. Arlington stands there smiling...
briefcase in hand.

ARLINGTON
Hello, Mrs. Lewis.

NORMA
Hi.

ARLINGTON
Do you have the button unit?

NORMA
Uhh... yeah... it's in the kitchen.

Norma goes to the kitchen to retrieve the box, leaving Arthur alone with Arlington.

ARLINGTON
And you must be Mr. Lewis.

Arthur stares at him... transfixed. *Does he recognize him from somewhere?*

Norma returns with the box and hands it over to him.

ARLINGTON (CONT'D)
And the key?

NORMA
Oh... sorry...

Norma reaches into her pocket and retrieves the small envelope and places it in his hand.

ARLINGTON
Thank you.

Arlington then opens the BRIEFCASE and shows it to them. Inside... the bills are stacked neatly in rows.

ARLINGTON (CONT'D)
Two-hundred thousand. You can count it if you like.

Arthur takes the briefcase from him and then closes.

ARTHUR
Thanks... we trust your word.

Arlington offers him a broad smile.

ARLINGTON
As you should.

He then turns to leave.

EXT. LEWIS HOUSE -- FRONT WALK -- NEXT

They follow Arlington out onto the front walk as he approaches his car. The engine is idling... and someone else is behind the wheel... but through the tinted windows it is unclear who is driving.

NORMA
You said before that the box is re-programmed...

ARLINGTON
Yes.

NORMA
So now what? Are you gonna go and make the offer to someone else?

ARLINGTON

Why yes. That's how it works, Mrs. Lewis.

(beat)

And I can promise you that the offer will be made... to someone you do not know.

He smiles... opens the door... and steps into the passenger side. The driver hits the gas and the car speeds off.

Arthur moves out into the street... watching the car go...

ARTHUR

I got his license plate.

INT. LEWIS HOUSE -- KITCHEN -- MOMENTS LATER

Arthur comes into the kitchen and goes to the desk and grabs a PENCIL. He then scrawls the LICENSE PLATE NUMBER down on a piece of scratch paper.

AXV-4049

ARTHUR

What are you thinking, Norma?

NORMA

I don't know.

Arthur paces around... thinking. He then opens the briefcase and starts counting through the money.

ARTHUR

Did he mean that we're next? Is that what he meant?

NORMA

I don't know.

INT. POLICE STATION -- BURNS'S OFFICE -- NEXT

Jim Burns sits behind his desk at the POLICE STATION. His SECRETARY (20s) comes in to his office.

SECRETARY

Your daughter is on line two.

JIM

Alright.

He picks up the phone.

JIM (CONT'D)
Norma...

INT. LEWIS HOUSE -- KITCHEN -- NEXT

Norma stares at the money in the briefcase.

NORMA
Hey dad...

JIM (PHONE)
What's going on...

NORMA
I need a favor.

JIM (PHONE)
Sure... what do you need?

NORMA
I need you to run a license plate
for me. Someone just came by the
house... and we think he might...
(looking to Arthur)
He just seemed real suspicious and
Arthur got the license plate and I
need you to run it.

JIM (PHONE)
*Okay honey... you need me to send
someone over?*

NORMA
No... if you could just run the
plate and find out whose car it is.
(beat)
AXV-4049 is the number.

JIM (PHONE)
I'll call you back in ten minutes.

INT. POLICE STATION -- LATER

An OFFICER removes a document from a PRINTER and approaches
Burns's office.

OFFICER #2
We ran those plates for you, sarge.

Jim takes the document from him. It is a blow-up of a
driver's license that belongs to ARLINGTON STEWARD. In the
photo... his face is not injured.

INT. LEWIS HOUSE -- KITCHEN -- NEXT

Norma and Arthur are pacing around the kitchen... thinking.
The PHONE rings... Norma answers it.

NORMA

Hello?

JIM (PHONE)

*The car is listed to an Arlington
J. Steward... do you want his
address and phone number?*

NORMA

Yeah.

Norma begins to write them down.

INT. LEWIS HOUSE -- KITCHEN -- NEXT

Norma is dialing a number with the phone in her lap.

FEMALE VOICE (PHONE)

Hello?

NORMA

*Hi... I'm trying to reach an
Arlington Steward.*

FEMALE VOICE (PHONE)

(long beat)

Mrs. Lewis, I presume?

Norma's eyes widen. She nods to Arthur and points to the phone. He rushes into the family room to pick up the other PHONE so he can listen in.

NORMA

Yes.

FEMALE VOICE (PHONE)

*I assume that you pushed the
button.*

NORMA

Yes.

FEMALE VOICE (PHONE)

*There is the myth of Prometheus and
Pandora... Prometheus gave Pandora
a box... and warned her not to open
it. But she did not listen, and
when Pandora opened the box...*

(MORE)

FEMALE VOICE (PHONE) (CONT'D)
*she unleashed a torrent of sorrow
 and misery.*

Norma stares at Arthur... unable to speak.

FEMALE VOICE (PHONE) (CONT'D)
*Your descent into oblivion has
 begun. The question remains... what
 will the cuckold of a husband do...
 to prevent the death of his beloved
 Pandora?*

Arthur stares at Norma... unable to speak.

FEMALE VOICE (PHONE) (CONT'D)
*Because really... Mr. Lewis... do
 you really know your wife?*

ARTHUR
 Who is this?

FEMALE VOICE (PHONE)
*I am the mother of Prometheus...
 and if you want to save yourself...
 I suggest that you go to the
 Richmond Public Library, and find
 the book with the following call
 number: F2988.34*

Norma is writing the number out on a piece of paper.

She disconnects. Arthur steps into the kitchen.

ARTHUR
 Norma...

NORMA
 Arthur...

ARTHUR
 Tell me this isn't real. Tell me
 this isn't happening.

NORMA
 This isn't real. This isn't
 happening.

ARTHUR
 I don't think I believe you, Norma.

EXT. STEWARD RESIDENCE -- MOMENTS LATER

Arthur backs his car out of the driveway and into the street.
 Norma rides shotgun. Walter is circling around on his bike
 with some friends in tow.

NORMA
We're off to run an errand. Be back
in a few hours, okay?

WALTER
Okay.

He watches as they drive off.

INT. ARTHUR'S CAR -- NEXT

Arthur and Norma drive toward downtown.

NORMA
There was owl... in our back yard.

ARTHUR
An owl?

NORMA
He said it was *his* owl.

ARTHUR
Are you hiding anything else from
me, Norma?

NORMA
(defensive)
No.

INT. RICHMOND PUBLIC LIBRARY -- NEXT

The CAMERA tracks with Arthur and Norma as they move through the vast space of the RICHMOND PUBLIC LIBRARY. They arrive at the ADULT FICTION section... and the CAMERA moves along the spines of various books until it arrives at the one with the call number: F2988.34

Norma removes a BOOK from the shelf and looks at the cover:

NO EXIT

JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

Norma shows it to Arthur.

NORMA
No exit.

ARTHUR
(mis-pronounces)
Sartre.

NORMA
It's pronounced Sartre. Jean-Paul
Sartre. The French existentialist.

She begins to thumb through the pages of the play.

ARTHUR
Never read it.

NORMA
It's a play... I read it in high
school. It's about three strangers
who find themselves trapped in a
room together for all of eternity.
They've quickly discover that
they've all been sent to hell.

Norma turns back to the inside cover of the book.

Someone has written in crisp penmanship:

RICHMOND TIMES-DISPATCH

SEPTEMBER 3, 1976

Norma runs her hand down the list of names on the library
card. The name of the last person to check out the book is:

STEWARD

INT. RICHMOND PUBLIC LIBRARY -- CIRCULATION DESK -- NEXT

Arthur and Norma approach the circulation desk. A female
LIBRARIAN (70s) is standing there.

NORMA
Hi... we're looking for an archival
Times-Dispatch from September of
this year.

She offers them a warm smile.

LIBRARIAN
Microfiche.

INT. RICHMOND PUBLIC LIBRARY -- RECORDS ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Arthur and Norma now sit in front of a MICROFICHE READER in a
long line of wooden desks in the RECORDS ROOM.

On the screen... HEADLINES from the year's newspapers scroll
by... stopping on the headline for SEPTEMBER 3, 1976:

MARS PHOTOS REVEALED

VIKING LANDER SENDS FIRST IMAGES OF RED PLANET BACK TO EARTH

ARTHUR
Arlington Steward... I remember the
name now. He used to work at
NASA...

INT. NASA LANGLEY FACILITY -- LABORATORY -- [FLASHBACK]

Arthur and Wendell are standing among a large group of
SCIENTISTS in the laboratory.

Everyone is assembled... staring at a large BLANK SCREEN,
waiting in anticipation. Cahill stands at the front of the
group with a WALKIE-TALKIE to his ear.

CAHILL
Alright... the first photo should
come down off the server in less
than a minute.

EXT. NASA LANGLEY FACILITY -- LUNAR LANDER MODULE -- NEXT

The CAMERA cranes up toward the GIGANTIC LUNAR LANDER MODULE.
Rain pours down from the night sky. Lightning flashes in the
distance... several miles away. Thunder rumbles.

The CAMERA approaches the UPPER TRESTLE BEAM... which crosses
the expanse of the structure. Mounted on top of the beam is a
MASSIVE ANTENNAE.

Standing on the trestle several yards away from the antennae
is ARLINGTON STEWARD. He is wearing a rain slicker and is
face appears normal. He carries a walkie-talkie in his right
hand.

ARLINGTON
(into walkie-talkie)
So place your bet... martians or no
martians?

INT. NASA LANGLEY FACILITY -- LABORATORY -- NEXT

Arthur stares up at the screen... waiting on baited breath.

Moments later... a LARGE BLACK AND WHITE PHOTO OF THE MARS
SURFACE appears on the screen.

The SCIENTISTS erupt in loud cheering and applause.

EXT. NASA LANGLEY FACILITY -- NEXT

Near the base of the LUNAR LANDER MODULE... a NASA EMPLOYEE named ROBERT BEVILACQUA (31) is standing with two others. They are huddled under UMBRELLAS... smoking cigarettes.

Bevilacqua has a WALKIE-TALKIE to his ear. He hears the cheering from the walkie-talkie.

BEVILACQUA
Touchdown.

INT. RICHMOND PUBLIC LIBRARY -- RECORDS ROOM -- NEXT

Arthur scrolls down to the bottom of the front page. A smaller article:

NASA EMPLOYEE STRUCK BY LIGHTNING

ARTHUR
An engineer at the NASA Langley
research center was struck by
lightning yesterday evening...

EXT. NASA -- LUNAR LANDER MODULE -- [FLASHBACK]

Arlington looks at his watch... staring up at the sky... nervous about the storm. RAIN pours down upon on the module... water running down in sheets on either side of the trestle.

He hears the cheering from the walkie-talkie. Thunder rumbles in the distance.

Moments later... a MASSIVE LIGHTNING BOLT STRIKES THE TOP TRESTLE BEAM.

THE TRESTLE EXPLODES IN A STORM OF SPARKS... ARLINGTON IS THROWN ONTO HIS BACK... HIS BODY ENGULFED IN FLAMES.

Bevilacqua witnesses the FIRE on the lunar lander module.

BEVILACQUA
Jesus Christ.

Bevilacqua and the others begin to sprint across the lawn toward the base of the structure to the ELEVATOR DOOR at the bottom of the elevator shaft on the south end of the module.

INT. RICHMOND PUBLIC LIBRARY -- RECORDS ROOM -- NEXT

Arthur continues to read from the article.

ARTHUR
The man received third degree burns
over fifty percent of his body...

EXT. NASA LANGLEY FACILITY -- [FLASHBACK]

Bevilacqua and the others emerge from the ELEVATOR at the top of the trestle. They rush toward Arlington's body... as he convulses on the trestle... smoke emanating from his charred body.

INT. RICHMOND PUBLIC LIBRARY -- RECORDS ROOM -- NEXT

Arthur turns to Norma.

ARTHUR
He got struck by lightning on the
night we received the transmission
from Mars.

EXT. NASA LANGLEY FACILITY -- [FLASHBACK]

Arthur and Wendell stand outside the main laboratory building with a group of scientists, sipping champagne. They see an AMBULANCE pass down the main street of the campus with its sirens on.

Cahill emerges from inside the building and rushes out to the parking lot. Bevilacqua and the others are approaching.

CAHILL
What happened?

BEVILACQUA
The module got hit!

CAHILL
Lightning?

BEVILACQUA
Yeah. Steward was up there on the
trestle. He got burned real bad!

The CAMERA moves in toward Bevilacqua's face... his eyes filled with anguish and despair.

INT. RICHMOND POLICE STATION -- NEXT

Jim Burns stands in front of a group of POLICE OFFICERS in a briefing room. He holds up a large FAMILY PHOTO of ROBERT BEVILACQUA, posing with his WIFE and YOUNG DAUGHTER.

JIM

Our fugitive is named Robert Bevilacqua. He shot and killed his wife at their residence on Cary Street earlier today. We believe that he escaped on foot... and could be armed and dangerous.

The CAMERA moves across a line of POLICE OFFICERS... listening...

JIM (CONT'D)

Mr. Bevilacqua is an employee at NASA... and he is a former Marine who served in Vietnam. He may very well be armed and dangerous...

INT. RICHMOND BAR -- NEXT

The CAMERA tracks through a dingy RICHMOND DIVE BAR. Bevilacqua sits at the bar with a baseball cap pulled down low to conceal his face. He is drinking whiskey.

Wendell James approaches... carrying a FILE under his arm.

WENDELL

Bevilacqua...

Bevilacqua turns to face him.

BEVILACQUA

Wendell.

They hug one another.

INT. RICHMOND BAR -- MOMENTS LATER

The two men are now sitting across from one another in a BOOTH. Wendell has a NASA BLUE-PRINT laid out on the table. The blue-print is of the button unit.

BEVILACQUA

You designed it?

WENDELL

Yeah. Cahill told me to...

Bevilacqua notices a SMALL PURPLE STAIN on the blue-print.

INT. NASA LANGLEY FACILITY -- LABORATORY -- [FLASHBACK]

Cahill stands over Wendell's shoulder as he sits at a DRAFTING TABLE in the laboratory.

WENDELL
This what you were looking for,
sir?

Cahill looks stares at the blue-print... possessed. A DROP OF BLOOD falls from his right nostril and lands on it.

CAHILL
Yes. Thank you Wendell.

INT. NASA LANGLEY FACILITY -- MAIN HANGAR -- DAY

The CAMERA moves through the MASSIVE MAIN HANGAR at Langley. There are several planes parked inside. Wendell emerges from behind one of the planes... *watching from a hidden vantage point...*

Cahill stands at a work table with Arlington. There are THREE BUTTON UNITS laid out on the table. Arlington begins to place them inside a leather bag.

Cahill then hands Arlington a FILE.

CAHILL
You're not gonna hurt these boys,
are you?

ARLINGTON
Any harm that comes to them will be
their own doing.

Arlington takes the bag and moves toward the hangar entrance.

EXT. NASA LANGLEY FACILITY -- MAIN HANGAR -- NEXT

Outside... there is a MASSIVE CEMENT RUNWAY. Parked on the runway is Arlington's car. BUD WALL steps out and opens the door for his boss. *Bus-Driver Bud is Steward's driver...*

Arlington steps inside.

Wendell watches them drive off...

INT. RICHMOND DIVE BAR -- EVENING

Wendell then hands a file to Bevilacqua. Inside there is a dossier and photo of a ARTHUR LEWIS. He flips to another dossier and photo of another NASA EMPLOYEE named KENNETH WELLER.

WENDELL

There's a list... and they've all
got a wife and one child.

Bevilacqua thumbs through the list of NASA dossiers. He sees Arthur Lewis among them.

WENDELL (CONT'D)

Did you kill your wife?

Bevilacqua just stares at him... on the verge of tears. He slides an ENVELOPE across the table.

BEVILACQUA

This is a confession letter that I
wrote... it explains everything
that happened with Steward and the
box. Keep it... cause if I don't
make it... this might clear my name
one day.

Bevilacqua looks at the KENNETH WELLER dossier.

BEVILACQUA (CONT'D)

This guy Weller is gonna be next.
Did you get their phone number?

WENDELL

No. They're not listed. Just an old
address south of Petersburg. What
are you gonna do?

BEVILACQUA

I don't know. I need a car. I might
be able to save them... and this
guy Arthur Lewis...

Wendell thinks to himself... then retrieves a set of KEYS from his pocket.

WENDELL

These are the keys to my cousin's
pick-up truck. It's not registered.
It's parked in front of my house
over on Byrd street. Take it...

BEVILACQUA

Thank you, Wendell.

INT. RICHMOND POLICE STATION -- BURNS'S OFFICE -- LATER

Burns sits behind his desk... telephone to his ear.

JIM
(into phone)
Steward. First name Arlington...
middle name is James.

He begins to scrawl words down on a piece of paper:

NASA

STRUCK BY LIGHTNING

Just then... his RECEPTIONIST opens the door to his office.

RECEPTIONIST
Sir... there's a Mr. Steward here
to see you.

JIM
(into phone)
Thank you... that's all I need.

He hangs up the phone and looks through the glass window of his office into the reception area.

Standing there through the glass... is a man who looks identical to Arlington Steward.

He stands with the normal side of his face in profile. He turns to face Jim... but his face now appears as it did before he was burned. *Is this the same person?*

Jim turns to his receptionist... who waits in the doorway.

JIM (CONT'D)
Send him in.

EXT. RICHMOND PUBLIC LIBRARY -- NEXT

The library is closing down for the night.

A group of young CHILDREN come out of the front exit. One of them turns and notices the OWL perched on the railing.

The owl stares at the children...

INT. RICHMOND PUBLIC LIBRARY -- NEXT

The real Arlington Steward is now standing in the periodicals area of the library... situated in front of the circulation desk.

He stands in profile... then turns toward the CAMERA in the same manner as his TWIN in the police station. *His burned face forms a deformed smile...*

INT. RICHMOND POLICE STATION -- BURNS'S OFFICE -- NEXT

The STEWARD TWIN steps into Jim's office. He reaches out and shakes Jim's hand.

STEWARD TWIN
Officer Burns... my name is Reston
Steward.

INT. RICHMOND PUBLIC LIBRARY -- NEXT

Arlington... with his eyes closed... mimics his TWIN'S movement exactly... *reaching out his hand and shaking it with nothing.*

ARLINGTON
Officer Burns... my name is Reston
Steward.

INT. RICHMOND POLICE STATION -- BURNS'S OFFICE -- NEXT

RESTON STEWARD (40) sits down in the chair across from his desk.

RESTON
I see you have made an inquiry
about my brother Arlington.

INT. RICHMOND PUBLIC LIBRARY -- NEXT

Arlington is now seated in a library chair... eyes closed... in the exact same manner as his brother. *It is as though he is controlling his twin brother's body via remote telepathy.*

ARLINGTON
...an inquiry about my brother
Arlington.

INT. RICHMOND POLICE STATION -- BURNS'S OFFICE -- NEXT

Jim stares at him from across his desk.

JIM
Yes. Apparently he made an
appearance at my daughter's house.
Your brother works for NASA?

INT. RICHMOND PUBLIC LIBRARY -- NEXT

Arlington nods his head.

ARLINGTON
Yes. My brother works at the
Langley research facility.

INT. RICHMOND POLICE STATION -- BURNS'S OFFICE -- NEXT

Jim nods his head in return.

JIM
With my son-in-law.

RESTON
That's right.

JIM
And may I ask... what do you do,
Mr. Steward?

INT. RICHMOND PUBLIC LIBRARY -- NEXT

With his eyes closed... Arlington reaches into his pocket and
retrieves something imaginary from his pocket. He raises
something that we cannot see up into the air.

INT. RICHMOND POLICE STATION -- BURNS'S OFFICE -- NEXT

Reston is now holding out a GOVERNMENT BADGE with his right
hand.

RESTON
I work for the CIA.

JIM
I see.

He then hands Jim one of his cards. Jim looks at it.

INSERT OF BUSINESS CARD WITH CIA INSIGNIA:

DIRECTOR OF NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE

RESTON STEWARD

Reston rises to his feet... putting his hat on his head.

RESTON

I assure you my brother is of no threat to your daughter. However, the man you're looking for... Robert Bevilacqua. He is very dangerous... and he might try and contact your son-in-law or your daughter.

JIM

Really.

RESTON

Yes.

RESTON (CONT'D)

Help us find Bevilacqua. If and when you do... please call us.

Jim stares at the business card as Reston bids him good-bye.

INT. RICHMOND PUBLIC LIBRARY -- NEXT

Arlington is now standing. With his eyes still closed, he nods his head and smiles, then turns and begins to walk several steps. He then stops... takes a deep breath... and opens his eyes.

INT. RICHMOND POLICE STATION -- RECEPTION AREA -- NEXT

Reston opens his eyes... as if a spirit has suddenly left his body. He takes a deep breath and smiles at the Receptionist, *trying to conceal his expression of horror.*

He moves toward the exit.

EXT. RICHMOND GENERAL ASSEMBLY BUILDING -- MOMENTS LATER

Reston emerges from the General Assembly building. There is a black town car waiting. A CIA AGENT stands next to it.

Reston withdraws a HANDKERCHIEF and wipes BLOOD from his nose.

RESTON
General Nathan Teague at the
Pentagon. Get him on the phone
immediately.

The Agent opens the car door, and Reston steps inside.

INT. RICHMOND PUBLIC LIBRARY -- RECORDS ROOM -- NEXT

Norma and Arthur are still sitting in front of the microfiche machine. Norma looks like she is going to faint... her face has gone white.

ARTHUR
You alright, Norma?

NORMA
I feel like I'm gonna faint...

She stands up to leave.

ARTHUR
Where are you going?

NORMA
Bathroom.

Norma moves toward the main library... leaving Arthur alone.

INT. RICHMOND PUBLIC LIBRARY -- CIRCULATION DESK -- NEXT

Norma emerges from the records room and walks toward the circulation desk. As she rounds the corner... Arlington emerges from behind a row of book shelves.

Norma stops in her tracks... frozen. He stares her down.

INT. RICHMOND PUBLIC LIBRARY -- RECORDS ROOM -- NEXT

Arthur stares at the microfiche reader... transfixed by the newspaper articles.

A shadow passes across the wall... and Arthur senses someone lurking over his shoulder. He turns to see that it is the LIBRARIAN. Something about her is different... she seems possessed.

LIBRARIAN
The myth of Prometheus tells the
story of a God who created man.
(beat)
(MORE)

LIBRARIAN (CONT'D)
When Prometheus flew too close to
the sun... his wings caught fire...
and he fell to the earth.

Arthur remembers her voice from the phone call.

ARTHUR
Was that you on the phone? You're
his mother...

LIBRARIAN
He finds your wife fascinating...
Mr. Lewis.

Her name is ELIZABETH STEWARD.

INT. RICHMOND PUBLIC LIBRARY -- PERIODICALS SECTION -- NEXT

Norma remains frozen... her mind racing. Arlington smiles at
her... gesturing toward an empty chair.

ARLINGTON
Have a seat... Mrs. Lewis.

She looks around... realizing that the library is now
completely empty.

ARLINGTON (CONT'D)
Don't be afraid. I may look like a
monster... but I can assure you
that I am... *only human.*

His face contorts into a broad smile.

ARLINGTON (CONT'D)
Please... sit down.

INT. RICHMOND PUBLIC LIBRARY -- RECORDS ROOM -- NEXT

Elizabeth sits down on the chair across from Arthur.

ELIZABETH
My name is Clymene, mother of five.
Prometheus, Atlas, Menoetius,
Logan, and Epimetheus.

A drop of blood begins to ooze from her left eye as she
speaks.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)
Epimetheus is the twin brother of
Prometheus, but he has become his
brother's slave... the victim of
his cunning and deceit.

INT. RICHMOND PUBLIC LIBRARY -- PERIODICALS SECTION -- NEXT

Norma is now seated in a chair across from him. He stares deep into her eyes... transfixed by her beauty.

ARLINGTON

Tell me Norma... when was the exact moment that you realized you loved your husband?

There is something about him that now makes her feel safe... willing to tell him anything.

NORMA

About five seconds after I laid eyes on him.

ARLINGTON

And when was this?

NORMA

In college. My sophomore year. He was a year younger than me. We dated for two weeks and then...

She stops herself.

ARLINGTON

You became frightened about something.

NORMA

Then I thought... this is too good to be true. When he sees my mangled foot... he's gonna be out the door in ten seconds and he's gonna go tell all his friends.

ARLINGTON

How did he respond when you showed him?

NORMA

We were at the drive-in... and he caught a glimpse of the scars on my thigh. He asked me what happened... and I felt this sense of dread.

ARLINGTON

Why?

NORMA

Because you can just see the glow disappear in someone's eyes when they discover something about you that they just can't stomach.

ARLINGTON

Did the glow disappear from his eyes?

NORMA

No. Not Arthur. He was different than the others. He... said that... my scars were cool.

(beat)

He said that they made me more attractive.

INT. RICHMOND PUBLIC LIBRARY -- RECORDS ROOM -- NEXT

Arthur sits across from Elizabeth. His mind is racing... trying to put the puzzle pieces together.

He looks at his watch. It is almost 5PM.

ELIZABETH

I have worked at this library for forty years. Since 1936, I have read a book a day. 23455 books I have read.

ARTHUR

Wow.

(beat)

Someone should nominate you for librarian of the year.

She holds the copy of *No Exit* in her hands.

ELIZABETH

Of all of the books I have read in my lifetime... this is my son's favorite.

(beat)

Have you ever read *No Exit*?

ARTHUR

No.

She reaches out with her hand.

ELIZABETH

Take my hand... and I'll show you.

He stares at the blood coagulating in the bag beneath her left eye.

ARTHUR
I'm not gonna touch you, lady.

INT. RICHMOND PUBLIC LIBRARY -- PERIODICALS SECTION -- NEXT

Arlington now stares directly into Norma's soul.

The scar tissue on the left side of his face does not move when he smiles. It remains frozen... unable to express emotion.

ARLINGTON
And what emotion did you feel when
you first laid eyes upon me, Norma?

She thinks silently for a moment.

NORMA
I felt...

She stops herself... afraid of how he might respond if she is honest with him.

ARLINGTON
You felt what?

NORMA
I felt...

ARLINGTON
Pity?

NORMA
Love.

ARLINGTON
You felt love for me?

NORMA
Yes.

ARLINGTON
Why?

NORMA
Because of my foot. Because of my
disfigurement. I thought of all the
pain I've felt in my life because
of it... the physical pain... the
emotional pain.

(beat)

(MORE)

NORMA (CONT'D)

I thought about what it would be like to have that pain magnified and projected onto my face... onto a part of my body that I can't hide with a shoe.

There are tears welling in her eyes.

NORMA (CONT'D)

I saw all of that pain in your face and I understood it... and I felt an overwhelming feeling of love for you because I knew I'd never feel sorry for myself or my goddamn foot ever again.

INT. RICHMOND PUBLIC LIBRARY -- RECORDS ROOM -- NEXT

Elizabeth continues to hold her hand out toward Arthur.

ELIZABETH

Take my hand, son.

ARTHUR

You called me a cuckold. You made a statement... made an implication to me that my wife was going to be killed.

(beat)

So please understand why I might be reluctant to take your hand.

INT. RICHMOND PUBLIC LIBRARY -- PERIODICALS SECTION -- NEXT

Arlington reaches his hand out to Norma.

ARLINGTON

Take my hand, Norma...

She stares at him, unable to move... then takes his hand...

INT. RICHMOND PUBLIC LIBRARY -- RECORDS ROOM -- NEXT

Elizabeth reaches out and grabs Arthur's hand against his will. His body convulses at her touch...

The CAMERA drifts in toward Arthur's face as his eyes slowly close. *Her spell has been cast upon him...*

CUT TO BLACK:

SILENCE.

INT. DREAM -- CORRIDOR -- NEXT

The CAMERA moves slowly down a CORRIDOR. The floor is shiny white marble and the walls are framed by ornate molding and RENAISSANCE ART.

Arlington stands at the end of the corridor. He is wearing a TUXEDO, portraying the VALET character from Sartre's *No Exit*.

The CAMERA pans around to reveal Arthur... walking slowly down the corridor.

Arlington opens a DOOR at the end of the corridor and leads Arthur into a DRAWING ROOM... recreated from Sartre's play.

INT. DREAM -- DRAWING ROOM -- NEXT

Arlington leads Arthur inside and closes the door behind him.

Inside the DRAWING ROOM, there are THREE COUCHES made in the style of the SECOND EMPIRE. The walls are covered in similar Renaissance art and the floor is marble.

NORMA and WALTER have now been admitted to the drawing room.

Norma is dressed in an elegant BLACK GOWN. Walter wears a tuxedo that looks to be nearly identical to the one his father is wearing... and *THERE IS A SILK BLINDFOLD WRAPPED AROUND HIS HEAD*. He wanders around the room... lost...

The dimensions of the room are equal in every way. It is a perfect three-dimensional box.

Arthur then looks to his wife. He notices that her EYELIDS are now gone. Arthur then turns to his son.

Walter reaches out into the air... seemingly unaware that they are in the room with him.

The CAMERA moves through the wall into another corridor... BUD WALL... dressed as another VALET, passes by... and the CAMERA moves into another DRAWING ROOM...

INT. DREAM -- SECOND DRAWING ROOM -- NEXT

Inside the SECOND DRAWING ROOM... the CAMERA finds ROBERT BEVILACQUA and his WIFE. Their DAUGHTER is wearing a SILK BLINDFOLD.

The CAMERA then drifts up and moves through the GLASS PANELS at the top of the room...

INT. DREAM -- UPPER LEVEL -- NEXT

The CAMERA pulls up higher... revealing the layout of a massive network of CORRIDORS and DRAWING ROOMS that form a larger box. Through the glass ceilings looking down into each room... FAMILIES are assembled together... trapped together...forever...

EXT. MARS SURFACE -- NEXT

The CAMERA flies over the edge of the SARTRE'S HOTEL of rooms and corridors to reveal the plateau of UTOPIA PLANITIA on the surface of mars...

INT. LEWIS HOUSE -- MASTER BEDROOM -- LATER ON

Arthur's eyes pop open... he rolls over... and Norma is asleep in bed next to him. They are both fully dressed in the clothes they were wearing in the library.

ARTHUR

Norma...

Her eyes open. She looks around... disoriented.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Norma... what happened?

NORMA

I don't know.

Norma notices Walter standing in the doorway.

WALTER

You came home an hour ago.

NORMA

We did?

She sits up in bed... looking at the clock radio. It is 6PM.

WALTER

Neither of you said a word... you just walked into the house like two zombies. Went straight to bed.

Arthur and Norma stare at one another, trying to make sense of what has just transpired.

NORMA

The wedding. It starts in an hour. We've got to get ready.

Norma sees that the copy of *No Exit* is now sitting on their bedside table.

EXT. WASHINGTON D.C. -- NIGHT

A U.S. ARMY JET flies over the nation's capital. The PENTAGON and the WASHINGTON MONUMENT are visible below.

INT. U.S. ARMY JET -- NEXT

The CAMERA approaches US ARMY GENERAL NATHAN TEAGUE (50s), seated just behind the cockpit.

In his lap is a file. He is thumbing through a series of photographs of the MARS SURFACE. He then arrives at a stack of paperwork. There is a photograph of ARTHUR LEWIS at the top of the stack.

INT. LEWIS HOUSE -- MASTER BATHROOM -- LATER ON

Norma, now wearing her BRIDESMAID DRESS, puts a DIAMOND EARRING in her right lobe. She turns to the mirror and jumps in her skin... *as the face staring back at her has no eyelids.*

INT. LEWIS HOUSE -- WALTER'S BEDROOM -- NEXT

Arthur sits on the end of Walter's bed. Walters stands in front of him as his father ties his NECK TIE in front of a standing mirror.

WALTER
What's going on?

ARTHUR
I don't know.

WALTER
This is about the box... isn't it?

ARTHUR
Yeah.

WALTER
Did you push the button?

ARTHUR
Your mother did.

WALTER
What happens when you push the button?

ARTHUR
I don't know.

WALTER
Yes you do. You're just not telling
me.

Arthur finishes with his tie. He notices something on the floor of his son's bedroom. It is the MARS COMIC BOOK.

He picks it up and stares at the dark figure looming on the cover.

ARTHUR
Where did you get this?

WALTER
Dana. She gave it to me.

Arthur begins to page through the comic book.

EXT. WILLOW LAWN MOTEL -- ROOF TOP -- NEXT

Arlington kneels at the edge of the MOTEL SWIMMING POOL. He runs his hand through the water. Steam is rising from the surface.

STROBES OF WHITE LIGHT begin flicker from beneath the surface... as though some unseen SOURCE OF ENERGY is emanating from down below.

Arlington slowly rises to his feet and turns to leave.

EXT. WILLOW LAWN MOTEL -- DRIVEWAY -- MOMENTS LATER

Arlington approaches the BLACK SEDAN idling in the car port. He gets inside... and Bud drives off.

INT. SCOPE INSERT -- NIGHT

The CAMERA looks through a TELESCOPE LENS of some sort from high on a ROOFTOP in downtown Richmond.

It scans across several CARS passing down the street... PEDESTRIANS on the sidewalk.... landing on ARLINGTON and BUD as they move toward the entrance of a STONE FRONT BUILDING.

EXT. RICHMOND ROOFTOP -- NIGHT

We see that a SNIPER, dressed in a dark suit, is perched on the roof of an adjacent building. He has an earpiece in his left ear.

SNIPER
Alright... they are entering the
building from the south entrance on
fourteenth street.

INT. RICHMOND GENERAL ASSEMBLY BUILDING -- MOMENTS LATER

Arlington and Bud move down the main corridor of the GENERAL ASSEMBLY BUILDING, approaching a bank of ELEVATORS. A SECURITY GUARD nods to them nervously.

Arlington nods back.

INT. RICHMOND GENERAL ASSEMBLY BUILDING -- MOMENTS LATER

Arlington and Bud emerge from the elevators on the THIRD FLOOR and move down the hall. As they pass into a RECEPTION AREA, the CAMERA moves toward a GLASS PARTITION with the VIRGINIA STATE EMBLEM etched into the glass.

Below it is a name:

HOUSE OF DELEGATES

GRIFFITH POWELL - MAJORITY LEADER

INT. GRIFFITH POWELL'S OFFICE -- RECEPTION -- NEXT

As they approach the RECEPTION AREA... the FEMALE RECEPTIONIST (30s) stands up anxiously behind her desk.

RECEPTIONIST
Excuse me... may I help you?

ARLINGTON
Where is he?

RECEPTIONIST
Uhhh... he's in a meeting.

ARLINGTON
I need to see him... now.

INT. GRIFFITH POWELL'S OFFICE -- NEXT

The RECEPTIONIST comes into the office. Griffith Powell stands at the window behind his desk... smoking a cigarette. He is dressed in a TUXEDO with his jacket hanging next to his desk.

RECEPTIONIST

He's here... I don't know what to do.

Powell turns to face her.

POWELL

Let him in.

The Receptionist goes back out... and within moments... Arlington and Bud enter the office. The Receptionist closes the door and leaves them alone.

ARLINGTON

Hello Senator.

POWELL

(terrified)

Mr. Steward... it's good to see you.

ARLINGTON

Call me Arlington.

POWELL

Okay... Arlington.

Bud just stares at the Senator... showing no sign of emotion.

ARLINGTON

Do you have my money?

POWELL

I've given you four-hundred thousand already. How much more are you going to need?

ARLINGTON

As much as it takes.

Powell sighs out loud... irritated.

ARLINGTON (CONT'D)

First the nose...

Powell turns around and there is now BLOOD GUSHING from his nose...

ARLINGTON (CONT'D)

Then the ears...

BLOOD begins to ooze from both ears... as he covers his face... feeling the warm fluid rush from every orifice...

ARLINGTON (CONT'D)

Then the eyes...

Blood rushes from beneath his eyelids... his entire face covered in BLOOD... his WHITE SHIRT DRENCHED...

POWELL
Please! I've got it right here!

Powell reaches beneath his desk and retrieves a large briefcase. He places it on the desk.

POWELL (CONT'D)
It's all there! Two-hundred thousand! You can count it if you want!

ARLINGTON
Bud...

Bud grabs the briefcase from the desk and pops it open. He sees that it is filled with stacks of cash.

ARLINGTON (CONT'D)
You tell that sniper you have perched on that roof next door that I can smell his cheap cologne.

EXT. RICHMOND ROOFTOP -- NEXT

The SNIPER hears Arlington's VOICE in his earpiece.

ARLINGTON (EARPIECE)
I think it might be Old Spice.

The Sniper smells his shoulder.

INT. POWELL'S OFFICE -- RECEPTION -- NEXT

Arlington and Bud move through the reception area. The Receptionist lurks behind her desk... frightened.

INT. FOREST LAWN BAPTIST CHURCH -- NIGHT

Arthur and Norma are standing in a WAITING ROOM in the church where her sister is about to be married. BRIDESMAIDS and GROOMSMEN are chatting with one another in anticipation of the ceremony.

Norma clutches the copy of *No Exit*.

ARTHUR
You and Walter were there in the room. You were wearing a black dress, identical to the one you have on now.

(MORE)

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
 Walter had a blindfold on.
 (beat)
 And then your eyes...

NORMA
 They didn't have lids...

ARTHUR
 Yeah.

NORMA
 I had the same dream.

Arthur's mind is racing... he glances through the crowd nervously, afraid that they are being watched.

ARTHUR
 What's the last thing you remember?

NORMA
 The library. He was asking me all
 of these questions... about you...
 about our marriage.
 (beat)
 Then I took his hand...

Susan approaches...

SUSAN
 Alright girls... time to line up!

Susan hands Arthur the book and goes off with the other BRIDESMAIDS.

INT. FOREST LAWN BAPTIST CHURCH -- NIGHT

Norma stands next to Deborah as she is about to take her vows.

PREACHER
 Do you, Deborah Burns, take Edward
 Powell, to be your lawfully wedded
 husband, 'til death do you part?

DEBORAH
 I do.

Norma looks over to Arthur, as he sits in the congregation. *He is not paying attention to the wedding. He is reading Sartre's play...*

The CAMERA zooms into a close-up of the page describing the final scene in the play *No Exit*:

INSERT OF PAGE:

ESTELLE: *[with a peal of laughter]*: Forever. My God, how funny! Forever.

GARCIN: *[looks over at the two women, and joins in the laughter]*: For ever, and ever, and ever.

INSERT: Arthur's eyes... reading...

INSERT OF PAGE:

[They slump onto their respective sofas. A long silence. Their laughter dies away and they gaze at each other.]

GARCIN: Well, well, let's get on with it...

CURTAIN

EXT. FOREST LAWN SQUARE -- NIGHT

The WEDDING PARTY comes pouring out of the church. There is a massive LAWN south of the entrance. During the holidays it is filled with CHRISTMAS TREES for sale, and dozens of ARTS & CRAFTS BOOTHS assembled in rows.

The CAMERA moves through the crowd to find Norma posing for photos with her fellow bridesmaids out in front of the square.

ACROSS THE SQUARE... Bud Wall lurks within the rows of Christmas Trees. He spies Arthur and Walter mingling with his parents and Senator Powell, who has TWO SECRET SERVICEMEN standing close by.

EXT. VIRGINIA HOUSE -- LATER ON

The CAMERA approaches the driveway of the VIRGINIA HOUSE... which is positioned at the south end of Forest Lawn square.

Wedding guests are arriving in droves.

The house is a large GOTHIC MANSION that is often rented out for public events... and in this case... for the lavish WEDDING RECEPTION of Deborah Burns and Edward Powell.

EXT. VIRGINIA HOUSE -- BACK LAWN -- LATER ON

Arthur and Norma move through the courtyard into the wedding reception area... which flows through several TENTS that have been erected with HEAT LAMPS and tables covered in WHITE TABLECLOTHS and FLORAL ARRANGEMENTS.

Arthur carries the copy of *No Exit* with him.

ARTHUR

The play tells the story of three people, condemned to hell. They are to remain in a second empire drawing room for all of eternity.

He closes the book... his mind dissecting what he has just read.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

They soon discover that their eyelids are missing... and for all eternity they will be unable to sleep.

Norma remembers most of the play from high school.

NORMA

There are no mirrors... so they will never be able to see their own reflection... but only the faces of their tormentors.

ARTHUR

This is Sartre's vision of hell.

NORMA

Because Hell... is other people.

The look into one another's eyes... Norma sees a WAITER pass by with a tray of CHAMPAGNE. They both take a glass.

Jim crosses the lawn to greet them.

JIM

Arthur... can I speak with you privately for a moment?

ARTHUR

Sure.

Arthur walks away with Jim toward the edge of a PATIO that overlooks the whole party.

EXT. VIRGINIA HOUSE -- UPPER PATIO -- MOMENTS LATER

Jim and Arthur stand at a table. Jim has several PHOTOGRAPHS laid out on the table. They are mostly family photos taken from the house of Robert Bevilacqua.

JIM

And do you know this fella? Robert Bevilacqua?

ARTHUR
Yeah... I know him. He works at
NASA.

JIM
Do you know his wife?

ARTHUR
No...

JIM
Well... he shot and killed his wife
yesterday morning.

ARTHUR
No...

JIM
Yeah... He shot her point blank in
the chest in his kitchen.

Arthur takes a deep breath. He isn't feeling well.

JIM (CONT'D)
This Bevilacqua fella... if he
tries to contact you or Norma...
you have to call me immediately,
you understand?

ARTHUR
Yeah. Of course.

Arthur looks down at the lawn. Norma is staring back at them.

EXT. VIRGINIA HOUSE -- BACK LAWN -- LATER ON

Norma is now standing up on stage with a MICROPHONE in her
hand... giving her MAID OF HONOR speech.

NORMA
My little sister once asked me...
what's the best thing about being
married?

Norma looks across the lawn to the table where Arthur is
seated, next to Walter and their parents.

NORMA (CONT'D)
I told her that... it's knowing
that for the rest of your life
you'll never feel alone.
(beat)
Not ever again.

She smiles at her husband.

NORMA (CONT'D)

That is... until you get divorced.

There is laughter from the crowd. Deborah blushes... leaning her head on her new husband's shoulder.

NORMA (CONT'D)

Or... until he decides to kill you.

More laughter.

EXT. VIRGINIA HOUSE -- DANCE FLOOR -- LATER

Arthur and Norma are now slow dancing.

ARTHUR

Why did you say that?

NORMA

Say what?

ARTHUR

In your speech. That joke about me killing you.

NORMA

I don't know... I thought it was funny. Guess I've had too much champagne.

ARTHUR

Did your dad tell you about Robert Bevilacqua?

NORMA

No.

ARTHUR

He shot his wife yesterday morning. Did you know his wife?

NORMA

No.

Norma is still searching for some other explanation.

NORMA (CONT'D)

What if it's all a test for the aspiring astronauts?

ARTHUR

What do you mean?

NORMA

A psychological test. They want to see how you'll respond to a moral dilemma... the fate of a human life... determined by the push of a single button. Think of the men on the Apollo thirteen mission... sound familiar?

They turn slowly on the dance floor...

Arthur closes his eyes... his mind racing...

A VOICE breaks through the music...

VOICE (O.S.)

May I cut in?

Arthur and Norma turn to see a MAN standing there...

It is DR. EARL STUPE.

STUPE

I would like to dance with your wife. Do you mind?

Arthur glares at Dr. Stupe.

NORMA

It's okay Arthur...

Arthur looks at him... then back at Norma. His face has gone pale and he looks for a moment as though he might faint on the dance floor.

ARTHUR

I... I...
(swallows hard)
Will you please excuse me?

Arthur moves toward the stairs that lead up to the palatial estate. Walter is there... waiting.

WALTER

Dad! What's going on?

ARTHUR

I... I'm gonna be sick Walter...

He places his hand on his son's head for a brief moment and then stumbles up the stairs.

ON THE DANCE FLOOR... Norma is now slow dancing with Dr. Stupe.

STUPE

I know what they call me. Dr. Stupid. My patients... the ones who will still see me... they find out what I did and they stop calling.

NORMA

I'm sorry for that. I can't control what people say.

STUPE

I am Dr. Stupid now. Someone wrote it on my windshield with soap once. I figure it must have been a relative... a friend of yours.

(beat)

Oh... how they love you, Norma Lewis. And they love your husband... the one who saved you. Did he save your life? Did he rescue you from the oblivion that I manufactured?

NORMA

Yes. You have my forgiveness, Earl. People make mistakes... and if they seek forgiveness... they should be forgiven.

(beat)

That's the rule of my lord.

INT. VIRGINIA HOUSE -- MEN'S BATHROOM -- NEXT

Arthur comes into the MEN'S BATHROOM and rushes into one of the stalls. He falls to his knees... leaning over the toilet.

EXT. VIRGINIA HOUSE -- DANCE FLOOR -- LATER

ON THE DANCE FLOOR... Norma notices her brother NATHAN... sitting alone at his table in his wheelchair. He is drunk... lost in his own sadness. He smiles at her...

STUPE

There is that old cliché... that the lord works in mysterious ways. Well... I have met the lord. I have spoken to him in my dreams. And it brought me back to that day in my office when you arrived with a fractured foot... some thirteen years ago.

(beat)

He told me that it was essential...

(MORE)

STUPE (CONT'D)
 an essential event in the cycle of
 purgatory and its inevitable
 conclusion.

Norma pulls away from him. Blood drains out of his nose...

STUPE (CONT'D)
 For when the cycle of purgatory
 concludes... there is nothing left
 but a barren wasteland of rock and
 sand... a deafening wind and a
 cold, dry winter.

ABOVE... on the MARBLE RAILING... the OWL is perched on the
 ledge... watching...

ON THE DANCE FLOOR... Stupe retrieves a PISTOL from his
 pocket... and raises his eyes to meet those of his dance
 partner.

STUPE (CONT'D)
I am sorry my dear...

Stupe takes the pistol... places it against his temple... and
 pulls the trigger.

BLOOD SPRAYS across the dance floor... some of it on Norma's
 face. *PEOPLE BEGIN TO SCREAM AND THE ENTIRE WEDDING ERUPTS
 INTO CHAOS...*

INT. VIRGINIA HOUSE -- MEN'S BATHROOM -- NEXT

Arthur is now standing at the urinal. He begins to hear
 commotion outside. He turns his head to the left... when
 something COLD and METAL locks itself around his wrist.

Arthur turns back to the right and sees that it is Robert
 Bevilacqua. He is standing at the urinal next to him and they
 are now HAND-CUFFED TOGETHER at the wrists.

Bevilacqua retrieves a GUN from his pocket at points it at
 Arthur. He has dark circles under his eyes.

BEVILACQUA
 You can still save yourself. It's
 too late for me... but you can
 still save yourself.

ARTHUR
 Bevilacqua...

BEVILACQUA
 Follow me out through the kitchen.
 I have a truck waiting...

INT. VIRGINIA HOUSE -- BACK CORRIDOR -- NEXT

Arthur and Bevilacqua emerge from the men's bathroom into a hallway that leads into the kitchen. Beyond them... in the PARLOR... there is commotion among the members of the wedding party in response to the gunshot.

INT. VIRGINIA HOUSE -- KITCHEN -- NEXT

Arthur and Bevilacqua move through the kitchen. The WAITERS and WAITRESSES are all distracted by the commotion and barely take notice of them as they pass through...

EXT. VIRGINIA HOUSE -- MOMENTS LATER

Walter walks down the driveway as several POLICE OFFICERS rush past him, moving toward the entrance of the house. The whole place is being evacuated...

He looks toward the square... and begins to move in that direction.

The CAMERA drifts back toward the ROCK PILLAR that stands at the entrance to the house. Arlington is standing there in front of it. He is wearing his black hat... pulled down low.

He begins to follow Walter toward the square...

EXT. VIRGINIA HOUSE -- BACK DRIVEWAY -- NEXT

Arthur and Bevilacqua come out the back entrance into the driveway. There is a WHITE PICKUP TRUCK parked there.

Bevilacqua opens the passenger side door and the two of them slide across the seat, Bevilacqua behind the wheel.

EXT. FOREST LAWN SQUARE -- MOMENTS LATER

Walter wanders through a group of CHRISTMAS CAROLERS... moving toward the maze of CHRISTMAS TREES. *He looks over his shoulder... where Arlington emerges from a crowd... staring him down like a monster.*

Walter's face is ghost white with terror. He begins to walk faster through the maze.

EXT. VIRGINIA HOUSE -- DRIVEWAY -- MOMENTS LATER

Norma comes down the driveway with her mother and sister... overcome with shock... searching the crowd...

NORMA

Walter?

EXT. VIRGINIA HOUSE -- BACK DRIVEWAY -- NEXT

Bevilacqua puts the truck into drive and speeds out of the driveway onto the street.

Jim stands across the lawn, manning the chaos. He recognizes the two men as they pass him by... and he raises his WALKIE-TALKIE to his mouth.

JIM

I just spotted Bevilacqua... he's in a white pick-up truck. Potential hostage situation.

EXT. FOREST LAWN SQUARE -- MOMENTS LATER

Walter winds his way through the maze of Christmas trees... rounding a corner... where he runs into DANA.

DANA

Walter...

WALTER

Hey.

Bud arrives next to her.

DANA

Is everything alright?

WALTER

No.

DANA

Come with us.

She takes his hand and they move north back toward the church.

EXT. I-95 -- NIGHT

The WHITE PICK-UP drives south down I-95.

INT. WHITE PICK-UP TRUCK -- NEXT

Bevilacqua has his hands on the steering wheel... Arthur's left arm extended due to the hand-cuffing.

BEVILACQUA
(delirious)
Did you push the button... or was
it your wife?

ARTHUR
My wife.

BEVILACQUA
Yeah... me too. I wasn't even home.
She decided to push it when I
wasn't around to stop her.

ARTHUR
And now she's dead. Did you kill
her?

BEVILACQUA
I don't want to talk about it.

ARTHUR
Where are you taking me?

Bevilacqua retrieves a NASA DOSSIER from the dashboard and hands it to Arthur.

BEVILACQUA
Kenneth Weller. You know him?

ARTHUR
Name sounds familiar. Does he work
at Langley too?

BEVILACQUA
Yep. He's next. Him and his wife...
they've got the box now.

Suddenly... BLUE AND RED LIGHTS appear behind them...
followed by the sound of a SIREN.

EXT. 1-95 -- NIGHT

TWO POLICE CRUISERS are now tailing the pick-up truck.

INT. WHITE PICK-UP TRUCK -- NEXT

Bevilacqua steps on the gas... accelerating to outrun them.

ARTHUR
What are you doing?

BEVILACQUA
I'm not gonna let them get me...
Arthur... we've got to get to
Kenneth Weller. We've got to break
the chain... or your wife is gonna
die!

ARTHUR
How is she going to die?

BEVILACQUA
You're going to kill her!

Bevilacqua swerves into the ONCOMING TRAFFIC LANE to pass a car in front of them. A LARGE 18-WHEELER TRUCK is barreling toward them.

Bevilacqua pulls the truck back into the right lane.

EXT. 1-95 -- NEXT

The 18 WHEELER slams on the brakes... then jack-knives to the left... blocking both lanes...

One of the POLICE CRUISERS pulls off into the ditch... while the second CRUISER swerves and SMASHES head on into the side of the truck bed... *sheering the top of the sedan into two pieces...*

INT. WHITE PICK-UP TRUCK -- NEXT

Arthur looks back over his shoulder... seeing the cars smash together.

ARTHUR
Jesus! You're gonna get us killed!

BEVILACQUA
Did Steward take you to the library? Did you meet his mother... the librarian?

ARTHUR
Yeah.

BEVILACQUA
Did she tell you about Prometheus?

ARTHUR
Yeah...

BEVILACQUA
Steward has a twin brother... and
he works for the CIA.

UP AHEAD... Arthur sees FOUR MORE POLICE CRUISERS with their
lights flashing. They have formed a ROADBLOCK.

*Bevilacqua lowers his foot onto the accelerator... refusing
to back down.*

BEVILACQUA (CONT'D)
*This is purgatory... we're living
in purgatory...*

EXT. I-95 -- NIGHT

The WHITE TRUCK smashes through the line of POLICE CRUISERS
as POLICE OFFICERS dive for cover.

An Officer raises his GUN and fires off several rounds toward
the truck.

A BULLET explodes the right front tire...

The truck swerves and FLIPS OVER onto one side... tumbling
over and over along the interstate in a horrific crash.

ONCOMING CARS swerve into ditches... and the white truck
comes sliding to a stop on the wet pavement.

The CAMERA slowly approaches the smoking wreckage... catching
a glimpse of Bevilacqua... his face covered in blood. Arthur
remains hidden from sight.

EXT. VIRGINIA HOUSE -- DRIVEWAY -- MOMENTS LATER

Norma rushes down the sidewalk on the perimeter of the
square... searching for her son.

NORMA
Walter?

A BLACK SEDAN pulls up next to her... and Reston steps out of
the car.

Norma locks eyes with him... recognizing his face...

RESTON
Mrs. Lewis? Norma Lewis?

NORMA
Yes.

RESTON
My name is Reston Steward. I work
for the CIA.

NORMA
Yeah? Where is my son? Where is my
husband?

RESTON
Please... get into the car.

Norma stares at him in disbelief... as he opens the back door
and gestures inside.

RESTON (CONT'D)
(gentle)
Please... there isn't much time.

EXT. I-95 -- NIGHT -- LATER ON

Jim Burns walks through the aftermath of the crash site.
There are now several FIRE TRUCKS, AMBULANCES and other
EMERGENCY VEHICLES scattered on either side of the
interstate.

Robert Bevilacqua's DEAD BODY is now on a stretcher. Jim
looks down at him briefly... then turns to another OFFICER on
the scene.

JIM
Where's Arthur?

OFFICER #1
They took him away in an ambulance.

INT. AMBULANCE -- NEXT

Arthur sits up in the back of the ambulance. He has a small
scrape on his cheekbone... but otherwise appears unharmed.

An EMS TECHNICIAN is in there with him. He hands Arthur an
ICE PACK.

EMS TECHNICIAN
Here... hold this against your
forehead. It'll keep your head from
swelling.

Arthur takes the ice pack and places it against his head.

ARTHUR
Thanks.

EMS TECHNICIAN
I think it might have been a
miracle.

The EMS Technician shakes his head in disbelief.

ARTHUR
What?

EMS TECHNICIAN
That car accident. I've never seen
someone walk away from an accident
like that.
(beat)
Somebody upstairs is looking out
for you, buddy.

The door to the ambulance opens. A US ARMY OFFICER appears.

He steps away from the doors and General Teague emerges from
the darkness.

TEAGUE
Are you able to walk, son?

ARTHUR
Yes, sir.

TEAGUE
Please step out of the ambulance.

EXT. HOWARD JOHNSON -- PARKING LOT -- NEXT

Arthur steps out of the ambulance and sees that it is parked
in front of a HOWARD JOHNSON HOTEL on an exit of I-95. The
hotel has a DINER attached to it.

There are more than a dozen POLICE CARS parked in front,
along with several BLACK SEDANS and MILITARY VEHICLES.

Arthur hears the rumble of a HELICOPTER circling the sky
above them. Its SEARCHLIGHT sweeps through the forest.

In front of the diner entrance... more than a DOZEN MEN
operate VIDEO CAMERAS and STILL CAMERAS mounted on tripods,
all pointed toward the front window of the diner.

Teague is standing with Cahill and Reston, along with several
other MILITARY PERSONNEL.

Arthur notices Norma as she emerges from a BLACK SEDAN... she
looks exhausted... delirious.

NORMA
Arthur!

ARTHUR

Norma!

She hugs him... neither has slept in two days.

NORMA

Where's Walter?

ARTHUR

I don't know.

Reston steps forward.

RESTON

My brother has taken your son...
but he assures me that he is alive
and well.

Reston tries to comfort them with a smile.

RESTON (CONT'D)

Take a walk with us.

Norma and Arthur begin to walk with Reston, Teague and Cahill
toward the diner entrance.

RESTON (CONT'D)

Are you familiar with the myth of
Prometheus?

ARTHUR

Yeah.

RESTON

In the 1940s... when NASA was
formed, we began developing, in
secret, a project that we dubbed
the Prometheus Effect.

TEAGUE

Projecting fictional scenarios
about how we would respond, if and
when we came into contact with an
alien intelligence.

RESTON

If the intelligence had hostile
intent... or if it began to somehow
display proof of its ability to
destroy us, we would have a system
in place to begin negotiating with
it in secret.

TEAGUE

The goal of Prometheus is to maintain coexistence with this life-form, and eventually achieve peace with it, so that its power can be harnessed, developed and applied in such a manner that will benefit the human race.

Arthur notices that Cahill is holding a folder in his right hand.

CAHILL

On the night of September 3rd, as the server was downloading images from the Viking camera system that you helped design... we experienced an electrical surge from a bolt of lightning.

As they arrive at the entrance to the diner, Cahill shows Arthur a blurry black and white photograph.

CAHILL (CONT'D)

An anomaly in the series of Viking images produced this photograph of the Mars surface.

The photo appears to be a ghost-like TRAIL OF WHITE LIGHT streaking across the Martian landscape.

Teague nods toward the diner window.

TEAGUE

According to... it... and whatever it is...

Arthur notices Arlington sitting alone in a booth inside the diner... waiting...

TEAGUE (CONT'D)

A ghost... an apparition... a methane compound imbedded in pulse of electricity...

CAHILL

If the human spirit is assigned a specific bandwidth upon conception... twins... would provide it with a dual bandwidth carrier...

RESTON

(interrupting)

It claims to be more than six billion years old.

Arthur stares at the streak of white light in the photo.

ARTHUR
My camera... took this photo...

CAHILL
We've run the data sequence off the server more than a thousand times. Each time... this one photo in the sequence comes out of the dark room just like this. We can't explain why.

Arthur hands the photo back to Cahill.

NORMA
What does it want?

Cahill glances at Teague... who looks to Cahill.

CAHILL
I think the same thing that it wanted from Bevilacqua... except that poor boy is no longer around to tell us why he shot his wife.

NORMA
What did he say to you when you were in the car with him?

ARTHUR
Something about breaking the chain. He wanted to find the next test subject... and prevent them from pushing the button.

Cahill is writing diligently on his NOTE PAD.

Reston can now feel something taking control of him... he looks to Teague... terrified.

He closes his eyes... his body begins to twitch.

Teague stares at his friend... realizing what is happening.

Reston opens his eyes... now possessed... *blood draining from his ears.*

RESTON
General Teague... it's a pleasure to meet you.
(beat)
I would like to continue with my experiment... if you don't mind.

Reston smiles at the General.

RESTON (CONT'D)

Please do not interfere... as I assure you that if you do... there will be dire consequences...

Reston then turns to face Arthur and Norma.

RESTON (CONT'D)

Time is of the essence... and I'd like to invite my guests inside.

Reston opens the door to the diner and gestures to Arthur and Norma for them to come inside.

INT. HOWARD JOHNSON -- DINER -- NEXT

Arthur, Norma and Reston make their way down the long aisle of the diner, flanked by a row of booths, across from a long LUNCH COUNTER with a metal surface.

Arlington sits alone in a booth. He pivots his head around to face them.

ARLINGTON

Please have a seat.

Reston sits down next to his twin brother... Arthur and Norma sit down across from the twins.

Arlington has now locked completely into his brother's spirit...

The movement of the two men is in now in PERFECT SYNCHRONICITY, staggered by exactly one second... Reston following Arlington.

Arlington's eyes remain closed in deep concentration...

Arlington's lips move silently... and Reston repeats them out loud. *Reston's demeanor is now kind... gentle... almost apologetic for his past behavior.*

RESTON/ARLINGTON

Don't be frightened by my manner of communication... but it is becoming more difficult for me to speak, given my body's... condition.

NORMA

What have you done with our son?

RESTON/ARLINGTON
 We'll get to him in a moment... but
 first I want you to know that I
 have a deep respect and admiration
 you both, and I am very sorry...
 that you pushed the button.

EXT. WILLOW LAWN MOTEL -- POOL -- NEXT

Bud now has Walter laid out on the cement next the edge of the SWIMMING POOL at the shallow end. The boy is unconscious... still dressed in his suit from the wedding.

From across the pool... Dana is squatting on the end of the DIVING BOARD... watching them.

Bud then removes Walter's right shoe and sock... exposing his bare foot. He then retrieves a *SERRATED HUNTING KNIFE*... and cuts in the flesh from his *BIG TOE* across the ball of his foot... drawing blood.

INT. HOWARD JOHNSON -- DINER -- NEXT

Reston closes his eyes for a moment. When he opens them... tears have begun to form, as though he cannot bear the news that his brother is forcing him to deliver.

RESTON/ARLINGTON
 I will now give you a chance to
 save yourselves... an opportunity
 for redemption and salvation.

EXT. WILLOW LAWN MOTEL -- POOL -- NEXT

Bud is now carrying the unconscious Walter in his arms. He steps into the shallow end of the heated pool... and dunks the boy under the surface.

BLOOD from the cut on the bottom of his foot drains out into the water like red ink...

INT. HOWARD JOHNSON -- DINER -- NEXT

Norma closes her eyes... the impending sense of dread building inside of her.

RESTON/ARLINGTON
 Two of your son's five functional
 senses have been permanently
 impaired.

EXT. WILLOW LAWN MOTEL -- POOL -- NEXT

UNDERWATER... Walter floats with his arms spread wide...
WHITE STROBES OF LIGHT FLICKER AROUND HIM. *The light streaks
bear a close resemblance to the image in the Mars photo.*

Blood streams out from his foot into the water.

INT. HOWARD JOHNSON -- DINER -- NEXT

Blood is now flowing out of Reston's left nostril. Both
Arthur and Norma recoil in horror.

RESTON/ARLINGTON
He is now blind and deaf.
(beat)
*For the rest of his life, he will
never hear your voice... or see
your face.*

ARTHUR
(under his breath)
Why...

RESTON/ARLINGTON
You are now presented with two
options.
(beat)
Option one... you enjoy the rest of
your lives with the money you have
been given, and you learn to live
with your son's disability.

Reston then reaches into his pocket and retrieves a PISTOL.
He places it on the table next to the box.

RESTON/ARLINGTON (CONT'D)
And then there is option number
two.
(beat)
There is one bullet in the chamber
of this gun.

Reston slides the gun across the table in Arthur's direction.

RESTON/ARLINGTON (CONT'D)
You can fire this bullet into your
wife's heart... killing her.
(beat)
At the exact moment that her spirit
departs the earth, this curse upon
your son will be reversed, and both
of his impaired senses will
instantaneously return to normal.

Arthur looks over at Norma in disbelief... then back at the twins. He cannot fathom how it has now come to this.

RESTON/ARLINGTON (CONT'D)
 Arthur, you will then be arrested
 and charged with the murder of your
 wife... and the money will be
 placed in an interest bearing trust
 for your son to receive upon his
 eighteenth birthday.

NORMA
 That's not fair.
 (beat)
 Let me do it. I pushed your stupid
 button. If I deserve to be punished
 for it... then let me kill myself.
 Arthur has nothing to do with this.

RESTON/ARLINGTON
 I'm sorry, but the offer is not
 negotiable.
 (to Arthur)
 And if Norma's fingers so much as
 touch the weapon at any point from
 this moment on... the restoration
 of Walter's sight and sound will be
 denied.

NORMA
 If Arthur has to do it... then I
 want you to make it look like a
 suicide. Arthur shouldn't be
 punished for something that I did.

RESTON/ARLINGTON
 I'm sorry... but the terms of the
 offer are not negotiable.

Arthur faces has gone completely white.

ARTHUR
 Is there an afterlife?

The twins smile cryptically in response to Arthur's question.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
 Because this is purgatory, right?
 The earth is purgatory... and
 you're here to start shutting
 things down... right?

The twins appear impressed with his foresight.

RESTON/ARLINGTON
I find your theory to be quite
fascinating. But I must remind you
that I am unable to disclose the
identity of my employers.

Arthur glances out the window at all of the cameras.

ARTHUR
Right. I get it.

Reston then turns to the window...

RESTON/ARLINGTON
Can someone please bring up the
car?

EXT. HOWARD JOHNSON -- DINER -- MOMENTS LATER

Arthur and Norma emerge from the diner in a state of
delirium. A SOLDIER pulls up in Arthur's TRANS-AM. He steps
out of the car and holds the door open.

Teague and Cahill approach... as MEN in dark suits snap
hundreds of photographs of the couple.

Cahill puts his hand on Arthur's shoulder... searching for
words.

Teague glances inside the diner... then back at Arthur.

Arthur nods his head slowly... his mind lost... and he limps
toward the car with Norma at his side.

INT. ARTHUR'S CAR -- NEXT

Norma sits behind the wheel... allowing Arthur to ride
shotgun. He looks weakened by the whole ordeal, and she is
afraid he might pass out.

ARTHUR
Tell me this isn't happening,
Norma.

NORMA
This isn't happening...

She starts the engine... and they drive off.

Arthur watches the parking lot full of MEN reflected back at
them in the side-view mirror.

EXT. INTERSTATE 95 -- SUNRISE

HELICOPTER SHOT: The CAMERA flies over I-95 as Arthur's car travels north toward Richmond. A MILITARY HELICOPTER flies overhead... escorting them on their journey home.

INT. ARTHUR'S CAR -- NEXT

Arthur sits shotgun as Norma drives them home. They have been riding in silence for quite some time now, having reached a level of complete mental and physical exhaustion.

NORMA

All these years... I've given you the impression that Walter was an accident.

ARTHUR

Yeah... and?

NORMA

And... it wasn't exactly an accident.

(beat)

I stopped taking the pill when I met you...

ARTHUR

Why?

NORMA

Because I was so afraid of losing you to someone prettier than me.

Arthur just stares at her... unsure how to respond.

NORMA (CONT'D)

For that alone... I deserve a bullet in the heart... don't you think?

ARTHUR

No... I don't.

She manages a smile. A tear rolls down her cheek as she stares out at the pavement and the endless trees lining either side of the interstate.

EXT. LEWIS HOUSE -- FOYER -- EARLY MORNING

Arthur pulls the car up into the driveway. The street is quiet and empty.

They step out of the car. Dana is sitting on the front porch, waiting for them.

She rises to her feet as they approach.

DANA
Did my dad tell you why he loves
you, Norma?

Norma realizes that she has been involved all along. Blood drains from her nose.

NORMA
No.

DANA
Because you're an amputee. He says
that the soul of an amputee leaks
out into the wind... searching for
the place where there is no longer
flesh and bone.
(beat)
It says that the soul that leaks is
the soul that endures. It is the
kindest and bravest soul of them
all.

NORMA
Where is our son?

DANA
He's locked in the upstairs
bathroom. I think he just woke up.

Dana turns away... and begins to walk down the sidewalk in the opposite direction.

INT. LEWIS HOUSE -- UPSTAIRS BATHROOM -- NEXT

Walter lays inside the bathtub, soaking wet. He is still wearing his suit from the wedding. He is shivering... looking around... disoriented...

His EYE-BALLS are now COMPLETELY WHITE... pupils no longer visible.

WALTER
Is anyone there?!

He begins clawing at the walls... trying to figure out where he is.

WALTER (CONT'D)
I can't see!

He climbs out of the bathtub and begins to crawl across the tile floor. He runs into the door... and then reaches up and finds the DOORKNOB. It is locked.

He begins to bang on the door relentlessly.

INT. LEWIS HOUSE -- UPSTAIRS HALLWAY -- NEXT

Norma and Arthur come up the stairs and round the corner of the hallway. Walter's HAND reaches out through the crack beneath the door.

Norma tries to open the door but there is a MASSIVE LOCK installed on it.

NORMA

Walter!

Norma reaches down and takes her son's hand.

WALTER

Who's there?! Who's there?!

NORMA

Walter! It's mom! Can you hear me?!

WALTER

WHO'S THERE?!!

NORMA

CAN YOU HEAR ME!!?

INT. LEWIS HOUSE -- UPSTAIRS BATHROOM -- NEXT

He does not respond... and begins banging his head against the door... harder and harder...

Thump... thump...

NORMA (O.S.)

CAN YOU HEAR ME?!!!

INT. LEWIS HOUSE -- UPSTAIRS HALLWAY -- NEXT

No response... just his head... slamming against the door repeatedly.

ARTHUR

We need to kick the door down.

NORMA

He could get hurt...

Norma begins to pound back on the door with her fist... and eventually the thumping stops. *She begins to hear quiet sobs from inside the bathroom.*

WALTER
Who's there? Who's there?

Norma rises to her feet.

NORMA
Come downstairs, Arthur.

She takes his left hand... as he clutches Walter's hand in his right.

NORMA (CONT'D)
Arthur...
(beat)
I need you to come downstairs with me... right now.

INT. WELLER HOUSE -- BEDROOM -- NEXT

SUZANNE WELLER (30s) sits on her bed. Her husband KENNETH WELLER (30s) stands at the window. Neither looks like they have slept in a while.

Suzanne has the box sitting on the mattress in front of her... the glass dome is open.

SUZANNE
I'm gonna push it.

INT. LEWIS HOUSE -- KITCHEN -- NEXT

Arthur and Norma stand across from one another in the kitchen. Arthur holds the GUN in his right hand... and he slowly limps over to his wife and takes her into his arms.

ARTHUR
Norma...

NORMA
Arthur... I love you, and I'm so sorry... I'm so sorry that I did this to us...

ARTHUR
I'm the one who told you to push the button... so don't apologize.

He looks out through the window at his back yard... likely for the last time.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
I love you too... and please
know... that I regret nothing in
this life we've lived together.

NORMA
I'll be waiting... counting the
days until my Arthur comes to see
me.

INT. WELLER HOUSE -- BEDROOM -- NEXT

Suzanne Weller smiles at her husband... reaches her finger
out and places it on the button.

She then presses down.

INT. LEWIS HOUSE -- KITCHEN -- NEXT

FROM UPSTAIRS... *thump... thump... their son's head banging
against the door...*

NORMA
It's going to be harder for you to
live than for me to die.

Arthur closes his eyes... the noise is excruciating. There is
no time to wait any longer.

ARTHUR
Well then.
(beat)
Let's get on with it.

Arthur kisses her... then steps back... still clutching her
hand... raises the gun... *and fires off a round into her
heart.*

Norma collapses... Arthur falls with her... *breaking her fall
with his arms as they collapse into a heap onto the linoleum
floor.*

INT. WELLER HOUSE -- BEDROOM -- NEXT

Suzanne looks over at her husband and lets out a deranged
giggle. He smiles back.

INT. LEWIS HOUSE -- KITCHEN -- NEXT

Arthur looks down into his wife's eyes as the life drains
from her body. *Seconds later... Norma is dead.*

BLOOD begins to flow from the exit wound in her back across the linoleum. Arthur is now covered in it.

INT. LEWIS HOUSE -- KITCHEN -- NEXT

Walter crawls across the blood-soaked kitchen floor and reaches up to the PHONE that is mounted on the wall. He takes his finger and places it in the cradle... dials 911.

INT. RICHMOND POLICE STATION -- 911 EMERGENCY -- NEXT

The CAMERA tracks along a series of CUBICLES at the POLICE STATION in downtown Richmond. An OPERATOR sits at each cubicle... each one female.

OPERATOR #1
911 emergency... how may I direct
your call?

The CAMERA moves in closer...

INT. LEWIS HOUSE -- KITCHEN -- NEXT

Arthur has the phone to his ear... imprints of his wife's blood are smeared on the phone's receiver.

ARTHUR
Yes. This is Arthur Lewis at 1560
Monument Avenue. I've just shot my
wife... can you please send an
ambulance?

The Operator begins to ask more questions... but Arthur does not listen. He hangs up the phone.

The thumping from upstairs has now subsided.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
WALTER!!!

He pulls himself to his feet and heads into the foyer.

INT. LEWIS HOUSE -- KITCHEN -- NEXT

Arthur rounds the corner at the base of the stairs...

ARTHUR
WALTER!!!

INT. LEWIS HOUSE -- UPSTAIRS HALLWAY -- NEXT

Arthur rounds the corner of the upstairs hallway... rushes toward the bathroom door.

Walter's hand comes sliding out from beneath the crack in the door. Arthur grabs it.

ARTHUR
WALTER!!!

WALTER
Dad?

ARTHUR
Yes... can you hear me?

WALTER
Yeah.

ARTHUR
What do you see? Where are you
Walter?

WALTER
I'm in the bathroom...

ARTHUR
Can you see clearly?

WALTER
Yeah... I can see... everything is
bright... but I can see.

ARTHUR
Everything is bright. Everything is
bright Walter... you're gonna be
okay, buddy.

WALTER
What's going on?

ARTHUR
You're gonna be okay, buddy. That's
all that matters.
(beat)
That's all that matters, now.

Out of the corner of his eye, Arthur notices something at the top of the stairs. It is a POLICE OFFICER. He has his gun aimed at Arthur.

POLICE OFFICER
BACK AWAY FROM THE DOOR AND PUT
YOUR HANDS ON YOUR HEAD!!

Arthur stares at the officer... frozen... the repercussions of his decision now stare him in the face with a loaded gun.

POLICE OFFICER (CONT'D)
I SAID BACK AWAY FROM THE DOOR AND
PUT YOUR HANDS ON YOUR HEAD!!

Arthur obeys... and the cop rushes over and pushes him over onto his stomach... handcuffing his wrists together.

INT. WELLER HOUSE -- FOYER -- NEXT

The DOORBELL rings.

Suzanne Weller opens the door. Arlington is standing there with his briefcase... smiling.

ARLINGTON
Mrs. Weller... do you have the
button unit?

INT. LEWIS HOUSE -- KITCHEN -- LATER THAT MORNING

A CORONER places a BLANKET over Norma's face as the house is sealed off by various CRIME SCENE INVESTIGATORS and other police.

EXT. LEWIS HOUSE -- FRONT WALK -- MOMENTS LATER

Arthur is now being escorted by two POLICE OFFICERS to a waiting CRUISER that is parked in front of the house.

Jim Burns is standing there with the door open.

ARTHUR
I'm sorry, Jim.

He stares Arthur down as he is put into the back seat of the cruiser. Jim closes the door and goes around to the front of the car.

Jim gets behind the wheel and starts the engine.

Arthur looks back through the window, toward his house.

Upstairs in the MASTER BEDROOM WINDOW... Walter is watching, tears streaming down his face.

Arthur reaches up with his hands... cuffed together... and tries his best to wave at his son.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
(mouthing silently)
I'm sorry...

From the window... Walter watches the car pull away from the curb.

He places his hand on the glass... *waving back.*

CUT TO BLACK:

